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## How do you know if you have vision from God or just a good idea?

Not long ago I was listening to a recording of a great speaker who was addressing church leaders. He was speaking about leadership principles that I found very inspiring. I found myself stirred to want to embrace these principles myself and was considering how churches could be transformed if leaders would exhibit these things.



Then something unexpected happened. I noticed that as the speaker gave real life examples, he talked about people who were not even followers of Jesus. In point after point, he exemplified famous political and business leaders who weren't following Jesus. Some espoused other faiths (Hindusim), and others were even hostile to Christianity. Like many success stories, these leaders had vision, drive, and leadership skills that helped them achieve worldly success, but where was Jesus in all this?

At first, I thought, "Well, leadership is leadership. Business, political, and marketplace leaders can move in Biblical principles even if not serving Jesus. Surely the speaker will eventually bring up Christian leaders as examples." But then the teaching ended, and no Christian or Biblical examples had been used. I thought to myself, something isn't right about this!

## The Marketplace Model of Vision and Leadership

Over the past 30-40 years, church leadership has been influenced by what has come to be defined as the “Church Growth Movement.” It has brought with it many ideas from the business and political world that have helped the church in many ways. The

**Vision in the Bible always involved sacrifice. If there is no willingness to sacrifice it is probably just a good idea rather than a God given vision.**

principles of vision and leadership have helped churches organize, develop compelling vision statements, embrace strategic planning, and develop great leadership teams. Other success stories, however, are often the typical American rags-to-riches, from struggling for survival to thriving in abundance, and those who went quickly from anonymity to international influence.

While helpful in many ways, there has also been a downside to this emphasis on business values rather than Biblical principles of leadership. We’ve begun to hear more from Peter Drucker than from the Apostle Peter.

**In business models of church growth strategy, we often hear more from Peter Drucker than the Apostle Peter.**

## Paul’s Vision from God Produced Different Results

When it comes to the idea of vision, I can’t help but notice how differently it affected the Apostle Paul compared to many marketplace models and examples of leadership and vision that we hear of today.

Some of the leadership clichés don’t fit well with Paul’s life (or the great leaders mentioned in Hebrews 11). You know the clichés, “Dream big and lead big; Announce the paradigm shift and keep pushing the envelope; Get disruptive with the vision and run it up the flagpole; Use win-win strategies with your team; Let the vision take you outside the box then keep coloring outside the lines.” Such ideas have the promise of bigger, bigger, bigger, success, success, and success, but near the end of Paul’s life, he stood before King Agrippa with an amazing statement about vision from God.

***Acts 26:19*** “So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision.”

The way it played out in the course of his life was very different than what we often hear in marketplace models of successful leadership and vision.

Paul left a promising career with the Pharisees. He had been educated at the school of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), one of the most noted rabbis in history. He had a great lineage "of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil 3:5), and his future was set for success. He could have continued to climb the Pharisaical ladder and be blessed with greater influence and prestige.

When God was initially putting His vision in Paul, Ananias was sent to pray for Paul with a revelation (which you rarely find in marketplace models of vision).

***Act 9:15-17... he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; 16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.***

How about when Paul was on his way to Jerusalem to fulfill the vision. He mentions something we don't find in most marketplace success stories.

***Act 20:22-24 "And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. 24 "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.***

"Not knowing what will happen" and "bonds and afflictions await me" doesn't sound like things that will lead to the successful fulfillment of vision. Yet Paul continued receiving confirmations to keep moving forward to fulfill this vision.

***Act 21:10-11 As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"***

***Act 28:17 I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.***

Vision from God was something costly to Paul. This was evident in what he shared with the Corinthian church.

**2Co 11:23-28** ...24 *Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches.*

Sometimes it takes more faith to suffer for vision than to move towards marketplace models of success.

## Important questions to consider in discerning whether a vision is from God or just a good idea.

- What are the things that God has shown you that you cannot, not do, even during sacrifice and suffering? Vision isn't something you are content with knowing, it is something you must pursue.
- What things has God shown you that are so important to pursue that you would be willing to leave a "successful" group of 1000 who are not pursuing it, to join with a smaller group of 20 who are?
- What things has God shown you that would cause you to leave a city with lots of opportunity, to move to a smaller place where there aren't the same opportunities?
- What things has God shown you to pursue that would cause you to leave the comfort and security of a smaller place to embrace the insecurity of a bigger place?
- What things has God shown you to pursue that are so important you are willing to live your life in a way that is downwardly mobile instead of upwardly mobile?

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- What things has God shown you to pursue that would compel you to take a job with half your previous salary in order to put you in a place you could more fully pursue the vision?

Vision can often be described as a compelling picture God has shown you of a preferable future that you are willing to faithfully pursue, sacrifice for, and labor to see become a reality. It isn't something you are content to simply know, you must pursue seeing it become a reality. If this isn't present, then it may not be as much of a vision from God, but simply a good idea.

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