

It's Sunday Again--A Strong Compelling Vision for the Future **By Bob Young**

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Today I share my heart with my spiritual brothers and sisters in churches of Christ. Others may find help in these words, but I write for us. Other religious folks may be amused because what I write reflects pretty small thinking, but correcting a small vision (or no vision) requires a slow, constant expansion. God has a vision for the church. Read the book of Ephesians. God has a plan for saving the world—read the New Testament. God's plan involves healthy functioning churches and evangelism that aggressively shares the gospel, disciples making disciples; multiplication, not addition.

Vision—this may well be the greatest need of the church today. In most churches and organizations, too little attention is given to what is going to happen. Business as usual takes the day—doing what we have always done while hoping for different or improved results. Present circumstances and the ever-present "tyranny of the urgent" (including the tyranny of multiplied ministry possibilities) consume available resources. Prov. 6:6 says the ant plans for the future. To fail to plan is slothful; planning requires diligence.

Some people speak against planning. While I agree that strategies may shift and develop in a specific ministry or mission context, to fail to plan is to plan to fail. "When you aim at nothing, you hit it every time." What is your vision? What is God's vision? Learn to distinguish vision and strategy. The "what" must be continually focused and diligently sought—the "how" is flexible.

The principal "what" in God's vision for the church is evangelism! The church is satisfied with too little. On the mission field, we must demand accountability for sharing the message of Jesus. In the U.S. a local church can easily double every 10 years. (Churches that grow by attracting members can grow even more rapidly--decadal tripling is well within reach.) This is net annual growth of 10-20%. A new church can grow even more rapidly. Church planting is essential because new churches grow more easily and more rapidly. We need ministry and mission models that help to plant independent churches—churches that quickly develop and mature so that they function and grow using their own resources with minimal external help.

To summarize—

- Every local church needs a vision. Every mission work needs a vision. Reaching a vision requires planning.
- The vision must be...biblical, thoughtfully developed (it is not automatic), long term, strong, clear, communicated or shared, compelling, adjusted continually, pursued with diligence.
- Developing a strong vision for the future requires looking beyond the week-to-week (and year-to-year) activities and opportunities. In most churches and ministry or mission works, it takes a lot of energy just to keep things going week to week. The tyranny of the urgent will consume every available resource.
- Having a long term vision for the future is essential—considering what is going to happen, what is about to happen.
- The vision must be shared with others so that it becomes a part of the DNA of the work.
- The vision must be continually evaluated and adjusted. Without such diligence, the vision and the work will grow stale and fail to reach full potential.