

## How to Make Your Vision a Reality By Bob Young

Today I share my heart with my spiritual brothers and sisters in churches of Christ. Others may find these words helpful, 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.

Three essentials for developing a strong compelling vision for the future are **vision, mission, and planning**. Because these three words are often used interchangeably, let me clarify how these words are used in this article. Vision is the what—what will a church or an organization (or a person) look like when it is doing what it was meant to do? Mission is the why—mission reflects the purpose for existing. Planning is the how.

This article outlines four steps. The vision, mission, and plans must be identified, they must be seen as important, they must be integrated so they become parts of a single effort, and they must be implemented. Bringing the vision to reality requires **daring, commitment, and involvement**. These are described under implementation.

### Identifying the Vision, the Mission, and the Plans

**Vision**—This may well be the greatest need of the church today. (I write about the church, but these principles can be applied in individual lives and in ministry organizations.) In many churches, too little attention is given to long range goals, why things are done, and what is happening or is going to happen. This problem reflects a lack of vision. 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.

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.

**Mission**—Many churches do not know why they exist. The mission of the church is salvation—either saving people or keeping them saved. The church may employ lots of strategies (next section), but the compelling question must always be, "how is this moving us toward our 'why'?" The church that does understand that it exists with a mission focused in salvation will become unfocused.

The principal "why" in God's vision for the church is evangelism! The contemporary 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 double in 10 years with little difficulty (approximately 7% per year net growth). Churches that grow by attracting members can easily triple in 10 years, and even more rapid growth is not unusual.

Church planting is essential because new churches are evangelistic, and because they grow easily and 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.

**Planning**--Some Christians and some church leaders speak against **planning**. How will we get anything done if we do not know how we are going to do it? I am aware that contexts may change, new opportunities may open, strategies may shift, and decisions may develop in a specific ministry or mission context, but to fail to plan is to plan to fail. "When you aim at nothing, you hit it every time." What is the vision? What is God's vision? What is the mission? What is God's mission? We must learn to distinguish vision, mission, and planning or strategy. The "what" and "why" must be focused and diligently pursued—the specifics of the "how" are flexible.

The Bible encourages planning. For example, "May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed." (Psalm 20:4). Prov. 6:6 says the ant plans for the future. To fail to plan is slothful; planning requires diligence.

Goal setting is a crucial part of planning. Here are some things that will help you effectively set goals: 1) write each goal down, (2) set a date, (3) be specific, (4) review and pray about the goals. Another helpful model is SMART goals—specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timed. (The acronym has been expanded through the years: S--specific, significant, stretching; M--measurable, meaningful, motivational; A--agreed upon, attainable, achievable, acceptable, action-oriented; R--realistic, relevant, reasonable, rewarding, results-oriented; T--time-based, time-bound, timely, tangible, trackable)

### **Importance of Vision, Mission, and Planning**

- Every local church, every mission work, every person needs a vision. This is what this church or ministry will look like when it is fully functioning and doing what God wants (the what).
  - The vision must be shared with others so that it becomes a part of the DNA of the work.
  - Although the vision must be shared constantly, this is not the key to success.
- Making a vision a reality requires developing a plan that focuses on the mission or purpose (the why). Mission is more important than vision. Mission is the key—when every person involved in the church or work understands the why—the purpose for existing. This will ultimately measure success or lack of it. Are we reaching the why? Why does the “why” matter?
- Making a vision (the what) a reality, and fulfilling the mission (why) of existence, requires planning with regard to strategies (the how).

### **Integrating Vision, Mission and Planning**

- The what—the vision—must be...biblical, thoughtfully developed (it is not automatic), long term, strong, clear, communicated or shared, compelling, pursued with diligence.
- The why—the mission—must likewise be biblical and must be constantly kept at the forefront of the church or ministry. Otherwise, we get off-track and fail to accomplish the why.
- The how—the planning and the activities—is the hardest part. It is hard because many activities do not move us toward the what and the why. 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 and keep us from doing the things that are most important to the what and the why.

### **Implementing Vision, Mission, and Planning—Making the Vision a Reality**

When the vision, mission, and planning are understood, are seen as important, and are integrated into a single plan focused on the vision, you are ready to implement the plan. In this step, three things are necessary to make a strong, compelling vision a reality.

**Commitment**—It is easy to list what should be done. It is easy to read what I have written above and nod in agreement. Action is more difficult because action requires commitment. Commitment shows that you are serious. How committed are you to the vision, mission, and plans? How willing are you to make the investment required?

**Daring**—Reaching forward to a strong compelling vision requires something more than commitment. Two things show you are serious—commitment and daring. Daring is your willingness to leave your comfort zones. Daring is being willing to stretch and do new things.

**Personal involvement**—Personally decide to make the investment necessary to improve your life, church, and ministry. Investing includes time, effort, and money. Investing may involve training, more education, or other opportunities. If you are not willing to invest and to seek transformative learning, everything in your life will remain the same.

### **Something to Pray About**

- Having long-term vision, mission, and plans is essential—you should be constantly thinking in terms of the what, the why, and the how.
- The vision, mission, and plans must be continually evaluated and renewed. Without such diligence, you will grow stale and fail to reach full potential.
- You must become personally involved, which is evidenced by being willing to invest.
- You show that you are serious by your commitment and your willingness to leave your comfort zones.