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YOU'RE NOT THINKING BIG ENOUGH

MY FIRST PASTORATE WAS IN A town of 300 people. Approximately 50 people attended the First Baptist Church when I arrived, give or take a family or two each week. It was a very special church. Each Sunday I would go to lunch at a different member's home. We will never forget those days. It was a great place for me to learn.

One of the greatest lessons about vision I learned in the simplest manner while I was at that church. Some of the church's leadership determined we needed to air condition the building. This led to a business meeting. We were discussing the situation as the ping-pong match began. One of the men felt strongly we did not need to do it because "times were hard." A godly woman in the church had heard about all she wanted to hear. She stood up and said to them, "God will take care of this. Let's help the church move forward to the future for our younger families." In her passionate speech and plea, she nailed the hard times issue by

telling them she would give the first \$1,000. To the best of my knowledge, that paid for almost one-third of the job. Needless to say, within minutes the whole issue was solved. The church was getting its own central heat and air unit.

In the middle of the match, I had resolved that the deal was over and that man had won again. However, I learned that night I was not thinking big enough! I had forgotten the power of vision and how people love to rally to a better future. The lady had called people to a better future, even demonstrating sacrifice toward it.

What God etched in my heart that night I will never forget. A godly lady had a vision and was not going to let anyone torpedo it. She had her sight set on younger families wanting to come to the church once it was modernized with central heat and air. She was right. She painted a vision, and people ran toward it.

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The Lord has used the lessons I learned that night and built upon them church by church and situation by situation. God wanted to build me into a man of vision and faith.

When I came to my present church in 1986 and preached for the church to vote on me becoming their pastor, I was grilled with questions for a long time in a gymnasium, the place we met for worship at that time. That night, I began to cast a vision in many areas.

I remember saying to them, “If God can use Wal-Mart to place retail stores all over the world from Northwest Arkansas, J.B. Hunt Transport to place trucks all over the world from Northwest Arkansas, Tyson Foods to place chickens all over the world from Northwest Arkansas, and the University of Arkansas to place Razorbacks all over the world from Northwest Arkansas, then surely He wants to use our church to place Jesus and His gospel all over the world from Northwest Arkansas.” That was a strong statement of vision and faith. On that night, I rallied people to a better future.

Through the years, I felt there was no way that would happen, but I continued on in the vision. With the limited population in this region, I lost my vision and faith periodically. Sometimes I would believe we had peaked and there was no way for growth to continue. Yet it continued to happen. Every time I felt the lid was on, God would blow the lid off of the church. I was not thinking big enough! Each time I would look back and say to myself, “I should have known God better than that.” Each time, vision and faith were contributing factors. Each time, people were rallying to a better future for their lives and our church.

Through a defining moment on January 4 of this year, God reinvented the vision I had shared on that day in 1986 about taking the gospel to the entire world from Northwest Arkansas. I believe a major part of the vision was fulfilled when the Lord miraculously opened the door for us to preach the good news of Jesus via daily television around the world, potentially into every country of the world. In January, this door did not exist, but God

honored the vision I declared due to Him speaking to me through His Word. Therefore, in April of this year, we began to share God's good news daily around the world right here from Northwest Arkansas! You know, I have become convinced of one thing: *I am usually not thinking big enough!*

The vision has yet to be fulfilled because God keeps expanding it. There is so much more God wants to do! I am confident this is true for you, regardless of what size your town or church may be. It is the size of your vision that matters, nothing else.

Vision is rallying people to a better future. Vision is helping people see what you see already. Vision is calling the invisible into visibility. Vision is usually determined by your burden and by your faith.

JESUS THINKS BIG!

When Jesus was about to ascend to be with His Father in heaven, He demonstrated the big idea. It all fit into His extraordinary plan. He had died for our sins. He had been raised from the dead supernaturally. Moments before His ascension, He laid some major visionary plans upon His faithful followers. He stated, as recorded by Luke in Acts 1:8:

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But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

This was a big idea. Jesus was thinking big! He was calling His followers to expand their belief in Him and His good news. He wanted His followers to begin sharing where they lived, then stretch to their own country, and eventually go into the entire world. This plan for reaching the world with news about His gift of eternal life became the marching orders to the church from our commander-in-chief, Jesus Christ. Any vision we have needs to be a vision that is tied to the vision of Jesus. He pulls for your vision to be fulfilled when you join Him in fulfilling His vision for the entire world, beginning with your own world.

When we do this, we experience a better future. We see things happen that do not logically make sense. We begin to realize that when God factors into our lives and churches, He creates something that is powerful! The supernatural power of God is unleashed upon you and your church when you have the heart for and begin to step toward reaching your region with the good news of Jesus with great intentionality. The power escalates along with the vision. It becomes the wind that soars your vision beyond what you have ever thought or imagined it to be.

Whether you are trusting God for central heat and air to be placed in your building, for preaching the gospel of Jesus worldwide every day on television, or something in between, ensure the

vision somehow connects with reaching others for Jesus. When you connect what you desire to do with His vision, you send your vision to an entirely different level. The commitment from the divine toward you and your church begins to escalate.

Any vision you have must involve the One who thinks big. You cannot outthink Jesus. When your faith is frail, you are not thinking like Him. When your faith is timid, you are not thinking big enough.

Are you thinking big enough? Is your church thinking big enough? Is the ministry in which you are serving thinking big enough? It all begins with our vision. What is your vision to rally your people to a better future? Do you have one?

RECEIVING A VISION

A vision is beyond a good idea. It must be a God idea. God does not obligate himself to your good ideas or brainstorming sessions. He commits himself to you when you connect with His heart and vision for your world. He expands your vision as you begin to touch your world. No one is more committed to reaching your world than Jesus.

Therefore, get with Him. Hang out with Him. Ask Him what He wants you to do. If you have any element of desperation or sense of urgency, retreat with Him, entering into days of prayer and fasting. Get yourself to the point spiritually where you can hear what He is saying.

God began to redefine the vision in a new way for me on January 4, the day I shared with you a few moments ago. He

used the passage from Habakkuk 2:1–4 to rivet my heart. This passage gives us five principles about vision:

- * *Vision Given: God alone gives the vision.*
- * *Vision Written: Write down what God is saying to you.*
- * *Vision Declared: Communicate by faith what God has put into your heart.*
- * *Vision Faithed: Trust God via prayer until He fulfills it.*
- * *Vision Realized: If God says it, in time He will do it!*

Vision is not duplicating what He is doing with someone else. It will be crafted by God using your giftedness, packaging it into your culture. Once you have it written down, pray it every day. It is powerful and keeps you on course. If you do not write it, you or others cannot run to it. Sooner or later, you are going to have to step into the water and declare it. It does not take faith to declare what God has done visibly, but it does take faith to say verbally what God has reported to you He would like to do through you and your church.

What if you fail? What if it does not happen? Hear what God is saying to you through His Word. Write it down. Declare it verbally when He permits you to do so. Wait in faith. God is the one who brings it to reality, not you. When the “what ifs” dominate you, you are not thinking big enough!

CASTING A VISION

Casting a vision involves sharing it in all kinds of ways with all kinds of people, all for the purpose of helping them see what

you see. I love to cast vision to people. Even though my knees may be knocking, I love to stand with the confidence of God's Word, step into the water, and rally the people to launch into that water with me.

I could tell you so many stories of how we have cast our vision through the years to our people. It takes hard work, much research, great teamwork, and various stages of meetings as you walk it through your organization before you make it known publicly. If the processes have been followed, it enables you to cast the vision to your people with confidence.

Beginning with the very first person or group you share it with, follow these vision-casting guidelines:

Cast it clearly: Above everything else, a leader must be clear.

Cast it simply: Keep it simple if you want them to grasp it.

Cast it visually: Technology is a friend to vision casting.

Cast it biblically: Tie the vision in to how it fulfills reaching others for Jesus.

Cast it creatively: God and others can help you do this.

Cast it enthusiastically: Passionate enthusiasm always attracts people to a better future.

When you follow these guidelines with the confidence that this is God's vision for you and your church, then people and resources will rally toward the better future you have promised them. Is it possible? Absolutely! You're not thinking big enough!

WALKING THE VISION

What does it mean to make the vision walk? So many leaders fumble the ball at this level. Walking the vision occurs when you follow the necessary steps to see the vision become a reality. You walk the vision through various people and processes so that the vision can be fulfilled. Some pay the price to get the vision, but do not take the time to walk the vision. Therefore, it is forfeited on the failure of the principle of follow-through.

What does it take for something to come to reality in your church? The answer to this is different for each church. No church operates like another. The minister and his team of ministers or lay leaders must understand the culture enough to take the time to do what is necessary to walk the vision all the way through to see it come to a reality. If you have received the vision and have taken the time to create the presentation by the guidelines I gave for casting the vision, then you are ready to walk it through the various people and groups to ensure its success. Yes, this involves time and sacrifice. You may be thinking, *I cannot do that*. You're not thinking big enough!

When I look back on my ministry at this stage of life, there are only a few visions I know the Lord put into my heart that have failed. They are the ones I did not cast properly or did not

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take the time to walk once God gave me not only the vision, but also the way to cast it. Thank God I have not suffered that disappointment in a long time. It breaks my heart to think about the things God would have done if only I had taken the necessary time and steps to nurture and walk the vision through the necessary processes. As leaders, we cannot forfeit what God puts into our hearts because of over-enthusiasm, desperation, or just not wanting to pay the price to walk the vision. Most visions die and now lie in the spiritual carnage of our disappointments because we have not taken the necessary steps to walk the vision into a state of reality.

In our most recent financial campaign for campus expansion and growth, it took us three years to come up with the product to communicate. Once we had that, it took two months of my time to meet with various leaders before I went to the church publicly. Once I went to the church publicly, it took eight weeks to communicate the vision through all of the venues, plus an estimated 40 home meetings or larger venue meetings where I shared the vision. The financial campaign I led personally by this process was by far the most successful in our history and continues to be so. May God be praised!

Place this into your context, packaged with your giftedness. God wants to do it through you, whatever “it” is. God wants to do it wherever you are, wherever “wherever” is.

You can do it. You can do it where you are. You can think big enough. With God, all things are possible. You have to believe. You have to act upon that belief with wisdom.

Remember that God will run to you when you are communicating His vision. He will mobilize the forces and resources of heaven to verify what is on His heart that He has placed upon your heart.

FULFILLING THE VISION

There is nothing more exhilarating to a leader than when the vision is realized. It is a confirmation the leader has heard from God, cast God's heart in the right manner, and prayed it through as he walked it into reality.

At every church I have ever served, I could tell you stories of how I have experienced this fulfillment. Perhaps the methods have changed and the visions may have become larger in human scope, but their fulfillment comes down to the reality of those principles I shared with you from Habakkuk. Their fulfillment has come because the transfer has been made from God to me to the leaders to the church as the vision was received, was cast before God's people, and time was taken to walk it through into reality.

Any vision you see fulfilled is not a testimony about you and your ability, intellect, visionary capacity, organizational acumen, or people skills. If you believe any or all of those things were your secret to success, then you're not thinking big enough! God uses all of those things along the way and they are necessary, but God can use anyone. He used Balaam's donkey! Right? You should already be doing what you can do on your own!

Vision fulfilled is a testimony of a great God who enables you to think like Him. God is attracted to a people who rely

on Him so strongly that without Him the vision is impossible. If you can do it on your own, then it is not a vision from God. You're not thinking big enough!

A TESTIMONY

If you hold this book in your hand, it is probable that we are nearing or have even passed the time when a vision God had given me has been realized. This vision began in my heart seven years ago. It was a vision to expand our church and its reach with an additional location. The work has been going on very successfully for five years. However, in the fall of 2006, we will enter the first phase of buildings on this new campus.

My points are simple. Praise be to God alone. Vision takes time. It is worth it. You cannot out-think God. Think big!

Remember: “*For nothing will be impossible with God*”

(Luke 1:37).