

The Life-Transforming Power of a God-Given Vision for Your Life

By: Dr. David Jeremiah

According to Dr. David Jeremiah, Duke Ellington, the late jazz musician, was once asked to define rhythm. Ellington replied, “If you got it, you don’t need no definition. And if you don’t have it, ain’t no definition gonna help.” “Vision is sort of like that,” says Dr. Jeremiah. “Someone defined vision as a hope with a blueprint. Vision is the ability to see beyond our present reality to create what does not yet exist, to become what we are not yet, and to have the capacity to live out of our imagination. A vision is an enlivening, Spirit-directed, guiding force that even in the secular world is behind all human endeavors.” Join Dr. Jeremiah for this inspiring message, originally presented at a Dallas Theological Seminary Leader Board event.

The older I get, the more important the issue of having a vision for life becomes to me. When God gets hold of our lives, He has a plan for us. He puts a dream into our hearts to serve Him. Then God uses that vision to move us forward in life and causes us to find the encouragement and satisfaction that we are looking for and that God alone can provide. Whatever your role or station in life, God can give you a vision for what He wants to accomplish in and through you. I want to help you think about what a God-given vision involves. And I need to tell you that every man or woman who has ever made a difference in life has had a vision that God has given them for something He wants them to do.

A vision is that dominant factor that governs your life. It determines all the choices that you are making. It's what's left of you when all the other layers are peeled away. It's what your mind naturally gravitates toward when it's not concentrating on something else. It's what you are at the very core of your life.

The Bible is filled with stories of people who had a great vision from God and set out to follow it. One of my favorites is Nehemiah, the builder of the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah risked death at the hands of the enemies surrounding him. His motivational instructions to his fellow patriots are a testimony to the vision that he had received from God. I remember underlining in my Bible Nehemiah's statement of his vision: "What my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem" (Nehemiah 2:12). When Nehemiah went back to Jerusalem, he discovered the vision God had for him. Let me share with you some of the life-changing benefits of a God-given vision.

A vision is what's left of you when all the other layers are peeled away.

A Vision Gives You a Dynamic

First of all, vision produces dynamic in your life. When you discover who you really are and that you have a unique purpose for your life, you are filled with a kind of joy that can only come from that experience. Each day is filled with a sense of anticipation as you watch your vision unfold and impact the lives of people around you. Most of all, you have this great sense of the future. I know that as we get older, we begin to wonder if that all goes away. No! When you have a vision, the future is always there. You never sense that God is finished with you.

A Vision Gives You Direction

A vision also gives you direction. Some people live all their lives as if lost in a maze. Have you ever been around people like that? Theirs is a mundane existence that seems to start nowhere and go nowhere.

But when you are fixed on a vision that you believe God has given you, you cannot just exist. Vision will give you direction, and staying true to your vision will make things happen in your life the way that God wants them to happen.

Somebody asked me one time what was the clearest vision I've ever had in my life. That's easy. I had cancer 11 years ago—lymphoma on two occasions and a stem cell transplant. My greatest vision was the vision of getting better. It sounds a little simple, but every day when I got up, that's all I cared about. I prayed, "God, I am going to do everything within my power to get better."

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That vision gave me direction and focus. It made decisions very easy. I said no to things, and I didn't even think twice about it. If it wasn't a part of my vision to get better, then I said, "No, thank you." I could only ask that the vision God has given me for ministry would be that clear and dynamic, because vision gives direction.

Nehemiah's vision gave him direction. He toured the ruins of Jerusalem's walls, then called the people together and said, "Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem" (Nehemiah 2:17). Nehemiah knew exactly what he was there to do. When you have a vision, you know what to do. When you see what God has put into your heart, it energizes you and gives you direction.

A Vision Gives You Discipline

Here's the third benefit: A vision gives you discipline. If you know the Book of Nehemiah, you know that after the project started, some guys named Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem came along and began ridiculing Nehemiah for attempting to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Israel's neighboring nations didn't want the city to be rebuilt. It was a threat to them, and so they were doing everything they could to scuttle the project.

In the face of this opposition, it was Nehemiah's vision for the project that held him to the task: "I answered them by saying, 'The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it'" (Nehemiah 2:20). Nehemiah was telling his enemies, "This is not your deal. This is our deal, and God will keep us on task."

When the building project was halfway done, these same three critics and their coalition came and tried to discourage Nehemiah again. It was Nehemiah's vision that kept him on task again. He tells us, "But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat" (Nehemiah 4:9).

A Vision Produces Determination

Number four, if you have a vision, it will help you exceed the barriers that you assumed were impossible before. It makes the seemingly impossible possible. Someone has said that obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal.

Too many people get discouraged and are ready to quit or change venues when they encounter their first obstacle. My father, who was also in ministry, used to tell me, "David, don't ever go to another place because of problems. The same person who is driving you nuts in the church where you are will be waiting at the front door in the church where you are going. So you might as

well stay there where you are and see it through.” Determination leads to the fifth benefit of a vision.

A Vision Produces Durability

Long-distance runners have to have vision. The goal can never be out of mind, or fatigue will set in and they will quit. The same is true for those who want to be long-distance runners for the Lord. You can never lose sight of the vision. History records the failure of many gifted people who lost their vision and didn't finish the race.

I am now 70 years old. This is the time when most people think vision is for younger people. But I want to tell you that in your later years, you need vision more than you have ever needed it in your life. It may be the refreshing of the vision God has already given you, but don't be too sure that He may not give you a new one. Perhaps the best work Caleb ever did was at the age of 85. You need a vision that will carry you through the transition years and keep you focused and motivated.

Seven Steps Toward a Vision

Those are some benefits of a God-given vision. Now let me give you seven steps you can take toward getting a vision, taken from that great passage in Philippians 3 that is Paul's vision for greater godliness. Here's the first step:

- 1. Dissatisfaction:** The first step is dissatisfaction with where you are. Paul wrote: “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect. . . . I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it” (Philippians 3:12-13). Paul was not satisfied with who he was in Christ. He wanted more. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:6). I have always been encouraged that He didn't say, “Blessed are those who are righteous.” I am convinced that the beginning of a vision is the realization that I am not where I want to be. When people come to me and say, “Pastor, I am discouraged about my Christian life and a little dissatisfied with where I am,” I love to tell them that they are in just the right place. If God has given you a thirst and a hunger for greater godliness and a closer walk with Him, that's the beginning of a vision. And that translates into step number two, which is desire.
- 2. Desire:** Paul also wrote in Philippians 3 of his burning desire for a closer walk with God. “Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (vv. 7-8). You can hear the desire dripping from his words.

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- 3. Dependence:** Paul got his vision from God. It all began for him with this question, “Who are you, Lord?” (Acts 9:5). If you have answered that question in your life, then the next logical question is, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” When you and that out, you realize that what God wants you to do will always be greater than what you can do without Him.
- 4. Detail:** A vision is not just a statement. It is what you see in your mind. Somebody has said that vision is the process whereby ideas and conviction take on substance. When you read Paul’s vision statement in Philippians 3, you realize how specific and detailed it is. If you are trying to discover what God wants you to do, you should try to get that picture as clear in your mind and heart as possible.

A great Biblical example of detail in a vision is King David’s vision for a temple in Jerusalem. The king had vanquished all his enemies and was enjoying his magnificent cedar house. But God stirred David’s heart with a vision to build Him a temple.

You can read the story in 2 Samuel 7. After David described what he wanted to do, the prophet Nathan said to him, “Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you” (v. 3). David had a picture in his mind of the temple he wanted to build.

- 5. Demanding:** A vision must be demanding enough to require sacrifice. David made great preparations to build the temple, even though his son Solomon would build it. The materials and the effort demanded a lot of David, but he was ready to do it because he had a big vision.
- 6. Durable:** A vision must be durable enough to resist discouragement. Just because you have a vision doesn’t mean you will never encounter discouraging circumstances or setbacks. I have a place in California where I go when I don’t know what to do. I drive up into the mountains and I sit up there and sometimes I pray and sometimes I think. I thought I had this great vision from God, and then all of a sudden, this barricade went up and the answer was no. This is not the end of your vision. It may just be a delay in what you thought was God’s timing. Don’t let discouragements stop you.
- 7. Dynamic:** Finally, a vision must be dynamic enough to recruit others to its accomplishment. If you have a vision and nobody else is involved in it with you, take stock. Maybe you need to make some adjustments. A vision that is dynamic will attract others!