



# Visionary Leadership

Probably the single most important tasks facing a leader is to develop an understanding of where the organisation needs to be at some future point. Without a future vision, organisations are destined to live in the past, and ultimately die. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" Proverbs 29:18. For the Christian organisation such vision must come from God.

## A Process for Developing Vision

This process combines prayer and reflection on our understanding of where God has already been moving. This process will take time - maybe some months to work through fully - don't feel you need to rush! It can either be used by the leader alone, or preferably with a small leadership group, which may be the formal leadership group of the church, or may be a selected group of people with appropriate skills and gifts. At the end of this process you should have an understanding of what you believe God is calling your church or organisation to do and to be.

**1. PREPARATORY PRAYER :** This first stage helps us to "tune in", spending time with the Lord. Pray that he will show you clearly over the coming weeks what he is calling the church to do and to be.

## 2. BUILDING BLOCKS :

God speaks to the church in a number of ways: through experience, through the Bible, through words and pictures and in other ways. This process allows us to reflect on what God may have been saying to the church in four different elements. We suggest you take time to reflect on, and pray through each of four questions, and to compile a flip chart to answer each one. This stage of the process could be done as a retreat or a day away either with the leader alone, or with a small team. :

<p>(A) <i>THE PAST</i> - The first flip chart answers the following :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What has been our previous understanding of the right direction?</i></li> <li>• <i>What visions, 5 year plans, strategies etc. have been agreed on previously ?</i></li> </ul> <p>Very often churches do not need to start from scratch, but to dust off previously agreed approaches, update them in prayer, seeing whether they are still relevant, and then re-energising people behind the vision.</p>	<p>(B) <i>OUR EXPERIENCE</i> - The second flip chart looks at the breadth of our Christian experience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What has God called other churches to?</i></li> <li>• <i>What does our reading of the Bible have to say about our current situation as a church?</i></li> <li>• <i>As we read other books, what insights can we gain?</i></li> </ul> <p>Almost certainly His vision for each place will be different, but there may be some commonality! God's leading for a church does need to be sought afresh in each location, but without rejecting out of hand that which has been found to be appropriate elsewhere. The "Alpha" course is a great example of churches reapplying something which has been found to work elsewhere, in very different situations.</p>
<p>(C) <i>PRAYER</i> - the third chart summarises what God has been speaking through the church in recent times.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Look through any prayer diaries to see common themes, pictures or words given.</i></li> <li>• <i>Talk with other members of the church who pray regularly.</i></li> <li>• <i>Spend some time with others being open to God.</i></li> </ul> <p>After spending time in prayer, write down whatever is on your minds. This may or may not be from God, but there may be a surprising degree of commonality.</p>	<p>(D) <i>CHURCH/COMMUNITY</i> -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Reflect on the church and the community which it serves. Try to see it how God sees it -</i></li> <li>• <i>Where are the needs, the pressure?</i></li> </ul> <p>Taking a look at previous parish assessment &amp; mission audits can be helpful here.</p>

**3. PRAYER :** Having compiled the four flip charts, spend some more time in prayer, asking God to speak to you through this reflection, and to give you His direction and vision for your church in the coming years.

**4. DRAFTING A VISION :** Now each member of the group should write down what they feel God is calling the group to. Everyone should write something. Try to keep it to a few sentences and stick to the big ideas. Then share amongst the group.

After each person has shared his/her draft, spend some more time in prayer, asking the Lord to confirm which elements of your discussions are his, and which are human desire. Discuss openly, and move on if you have agreement, otherwise repeat step 3. You may find these checks helpful :-

- ♦ *Is it in line with scriptural teaching?* Does the vision that you have received lead to God being glorified, and His church taking a servant role in meeting the needs of His people?
- ♦ *Is there a consensus in the pictures, scriptures and words of knowledge received?* Spend some time going back over this sheet and identify whether any elements point in an opposite direction. (They may point in a different direction if they are related to meeting a specific need, rather than setting God's agenda for His church.)
- ♦ *Do you, and others with you in the process, feel at peace with the vision in prayer?* This does not mean that you feel comfortable about achieving it - merely that you feel it may be "right"!
- ♦ *Does this fit with where God is already moving?* It may not if this is a new wave of God's Spirit at work, but in many cases it may be a continuation of God's prompting in the wider church.
- ♦ *When shared with other mature Christians in the church, does their prayer confirm it?*

**5. SHARING THE VISION :** Once you are in agreement, it is time to share and develop the vision with the wider community of faith. Encourage people to think, reflect and pray through the vision. It may be necessary to change it over time as the whole community comes to "own" the vision for itself.

**6. ACTION :** A vision that does not lead to some kind of action is unlikely to be of much help to the church or to God! Yet, turning a vision into reality can be extremely difficult. As a first step, take more time with a small leadership group and begin to explore ways that the vision might be turned into reality. Many of the later sheets in this pack seek to help this process.



## Visionary Leaders in the Bible – two biblical models to develop visionary leadership. ....

***Our first biblical model is Nehemiah, the rebuildler of Jerusalem's walls. Read Nehemiah chapters 1 to 6, and reflect on the characteristics of Nehemiah which help his visionary leadership.***

Nehemiah is clearly a man of prayer, and his desire to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem comes out of days spent in prayer (1:4ff) He is dependent upon God, and before asking King Artaxerxes' permission to rebuild the walls, spends time with God in prayer. Nehemiah translates the vision into action, and the walls of Jerusalem are rebuilt in 52 days. The people's commitment to the plan resulted from Nehemiah's ability to communicate the vision to them in a compelling and motivating way. Despite much opposition, the Jews remained committed to the vision, and persevered in rebuilding the walls, whilst half of the team provided protection. (4:16).

Nehemiah's leadership was not simply focused on rebuilding the walls - he also had concern for the people and their well-being. In Chapter 5, he reminds the people of the vision for how they should be living, and how far short they are falling. Nehemiah is personally committed to this, and didn't claim the benefits that were due to him on account of his office (5:14,15)

***We move on now to Joseph. Read Genesis 39 to 41 and think through the characteristics that Joseph displays.***

Joseph displays a number of the characteristics of visionary leaders. Although his prayer life is not specifically mentioned, 41:38 tells us that the Egyptians perceived the Spirit of God to be upon Joseph.

His accurate interpretation of the dreams, both inside prison, and in front of Pharaoh, clarifies his prophetic gifting as he speaks out what God has told him. (41:16) His appointment as principal minister over Egypt, and the degree to which he was able to prepare the land to withstand the famine are testimony to Joseph's ability to communicate God's plan in a compelling way. That the implications of the vision were to last for fourteen years demonstrates the length of commitment involved in carrying out preparations ahead of the famine. Such long term preparation and planning would require a very practical approach to complement the spiritual and prophetic ability that he had displayed earlier

From these studies of Joseph and Nehemiah we can identify some characteristics of visionary leadership. Visionary leaders are prayerful men and women, who are aware of God's prompting, and able to translate vision into action. They need to be able to communicate the vision to others, and be personally committed to it. They will need to persevere through hardship.