

3RD EDITION

DEVELOPING A
VISION
FOR MINISTRY

AUBREY MALPHURS



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To
my wife and family

Susan

Mike

Jen

David

Greg

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FOREWORD

In Robert Browning's poem "Paracelsus" a man travels toward a city, but it is surrounded by swirling mists. He thinks that he must have taken the wrong road and lost his way. But then the mist opens and for an instant he glimpses the spires of the city in the distance. Browning pens the triumphant lines:

So long the city I desired to reach lay hid
When suddenly its spires afar flashed through the circling
clouds,
You may conceive my transport,
Soon the vapours closed again, but I had seen the city!

A leader must have vision. We all see the shrouding mists, but leaders have seen the city. Leaders glimpse what others may not see and are captured by it. That's why they risk everything to reach the city.

Christian leaders do not have dreams in the night. Their visions belong to the day. Those who dream by night in the murky recesses of their minds wake and find their visions vanity; but the dreamers of the day are formidable men and women, for they receive their dreams from God with open eyes and they believe that under God they can turn them into reality.

Since our vision must be God's vision, we must gain it from the Scriptures. Some devout women and men, however, have taken an unauthentic lead from their commitment to the Bible. They long for "the good old days" of the church when God was alive and well and when he rolled up his sleeves and worked miracles. Their vision amounts to going back to "the New Testament church."

But which New Testament congregations do they have in mind? These early churches were infested with heretics. Members were at each other's throats. Some were guilty of sexual sin and many rejected apostolic authority. If our vision lies in a return to a New Testament church, then there's good news. We've already arrived!

Let's face it. There were no "good old days" for the church. There were no favorable times and no better saints than there are today. While we may learn from the past, we cannot copy it. A vision for the church in the twenty-first century cannot come from going backward into the future.

Our vision must arise from recognizing what the transcendent, contemporary God wants to do for his church and through his church today. Having seen that, leaders can then envision what God will do in the place they serve—the congregation at Fifth and Main in a particular community. Strong leaders possess a vision as great as God and as specific as a zip code.

Leaders also communicate their vision to those who serve Christ with them. John Ruskin spoke of that service when he observed, "The greatest thing a human ever does in the world is to see something and tell others what he saw in a plain way. Hundreds can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see. To see clearly and tell others clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion all in one."

Leaders lift people's eyes to what matters. By bringing the eternal into time, they summon Christians to a different kind of service, giving them a different perspective. Leaders must not only see the city but must also talk about it in plain words their followers can grasp and that grasp their followers.

Foreword

Yet, seeing and communicating vision is not magic. Leaders can be better at leading than they are. Aubrey Malphurs has written this helpful, down-to-ministry book that guides a thoughtful reader in developing a vision and inspiring others with it. One sure test of whether or not you are a leader is this: Does a book like this inflame you with indignation or fire your imagination? Leaders with enough imagination to capture reality will wear out this book as they develop a vision for ministry in the twenty-first century.

As Christian leaders we have something in common with Walt Disney. Soon after the completion of Disney World someone said, “Isn’t it too bad that Walt Disney didn’t live to see this!” Mike Vance, creative director of Disney Studios, replied, “He did *see* it—that’s why it’s here.”

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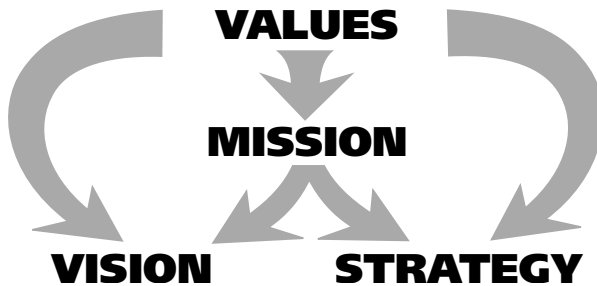
INTRODUCTION

Numerous leaders, whether in the church or the parachurch, struggle in their role as leaders. This is clearly reflected in the fact that Christian institutions across the land have arrived at the twenty-first century exhausted and gasping for breath. Ministering to and leading in today's world of the church and the parachurch is a leadership-intensive enterprise. Currently nine out of ten American churches are either plateaued or dying with no revival in sight. A considerable number of parachurch organizations are experiencing much the same. Not just anyone can assume leadership under these difficult circumstances.

Some set the number of churched on any given weekend early in the twenty-first century at around 17 percent of the population. To make matters worse, a number of cults and New Age religions, such as Wicca, are both filling the void and attracting some unchurched. Most important, we seem to be losing our youth. Some estimate that as many as 70 percent of young Protestant adults between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two have stopped attending church regularly. Why are they so important? Not only are they the future of the nation, but they are the future of the church. If the typical church in America were to go to a hospital emergency room, the doctors would be quick to put it on life support.

At the same time, there is hope. A new wind is blowing across the horizon of American Christianity. It is the wind of vision. God is presently infusing a number of new leaders in various Christian organizations across the land with a profound, significant vision for the future. *Vision* is a word that has been borrowed from the marketplace, but it is also a good biblical concept. It is timely and critical to leaders because vision has the potential to breathe fresh life into them and, thus, into their church or parachurch ministries. In short, there is hope, great hope, for leaders in the twenty-first century.

Vision is one of several critical concepts that have a great impact on a church's or parachurch's ministry. The others are core values, mission, and strategy. Figure 1 not only presents them but also shows how they relate to one another. A ministry's core values dictate why it does what it does. Thus its values will determine the vision.¹ The mission is what the ministry is supposed to be doing. Often the ministry's vision will be an expansion of its mission.² Finally, the strategy involves how a ministry will implement its mission and vision. Without a clear, practical strategy, a ministry will never realize its mission and vision.³



Vision in terms of ministry exists on both a personal and an institutional level. Personal vision concerns itself directly with the individual leader's unique design, which helps immensely in determining his or her future ministry direction. It comes as the result of discovering one's divine design from God. This unique design consists

of spiritual gifts, natural talents, passion, temperament, leadership style, and so on. The discovery of personal vision helps Christians in general and leaders in particular determine their future place of ministry within the body of Christ.

Institutional or organizational vision relates directly to the ministry of a particular Christian organization, whether a church or a parachurch. Once leaders have determined their personal vision, they identify with a ministry organization that has an institutional vision most closely aligned with their personal vision. This has several advantages. One is that it lessens the likelihood of ministry burnout. Another is that through aligning with the similar vision of an institution, the leader's personal vision has a greater impact, because it has the institution behind it.

Both personal and institutional visions are essential. This book is designed to help leaders develop a unique institutional vision for the organization they lead or are a part of. To accomplish this goal it is necessary to take six steps that make up the envisioning process.

The first step is to realize the importance of having a ministry vision. Here the question to be answered is, How vital is vision to ministry? Chapter 1 presents specific reasons why vision is essential to the success of any ministry that desires to be on the cutting edge of what God is doing in the twenty-first century.

The second step is to understand the definition of a ministry vision. Exactly what are we talking about? What does the term *vision* mean when used of a ministry? Chapter 2 defines vision and explains its key ingredients.

The third step is the process of developing, or giving birth to, a vision. Chapter 3 focuses attention on the participants in the development stage. It answers the question, Who in the ministry is responsible for birthing the vision? Chapter 4 takes leaders through the process of creating a vision statement tailor-made for their ministry. It also explains how leaders can know when they have such a vision.

The fourth step is communicating the vision. It is not enough to have a good vision. Leaders must become and recruit others to be vision casters who cast and recast the vision in such a way that people are inspired to own and follow the vision. Chapter 5 presents various ideas to help leaders communicate their vision, including the use of social media.

In the fifth step visionary leaders implement their visions. This focuses on the important area of leadership and the careful, patient construction of a leadership team to implement the vision. Chapter 6 helps the leader recruit a committed, cooperative visionary team who will own the same vision and work together toward the realization of that vision. Chapter 7 also concerns the implementation of the vision through team building. However, this chapter focuses on empowering a committed, visionary team to overcome the obstinate obstacles they are sure to face on the way to the implementation of the vision.

The last step is the preservation of a vision. Visionary people must know how to recognize and handle opposition and its fruit, discouragement. Failure in this area results in early funerals, that is, the death of the vision and ultimately the ministry. The last chapter helps leaders recognize and deal with various threats to the implementation process.

Finally, I have included questions or worksheets at the end of the chapters to help you and your leadership team think about, discuss, and work through the contents of the chapter. I recommend that leaders first read through the book themselves. Then they would benefit by reading this book along with their ministry teams and discussing and applying its contents to their particular ministry situation.

1

IT'S A MUST!

The Importance of a Vision

What has gone wrong with the typical pastor's ministry? Why have so many churches plateaued? What are the board members looking for when they want to know where the church will be five or ten years from now and what that will look like? Why are so many pastors preaching more but enjoying it less?

In general the problem is that the church and those with boards are looking for a leader. They want someone whom they can respect to lead them in the twenty-first century. In particular the problem is vision. The missing vital element in leadership is vision. To lead men and women, especially the hard chargers, pastors will need to articulate God's exciting, profound vision for the church's future.

Vision is crucial to any ministry. Ministry without vision is like a surgeon without a scalpel, a cowboy who has lost his horse, a carpenter who has broken his hammer. To attempt a ministry without a clear, well-articulated vision is to invite a stillbirth. Church and parachurch ministries may grow at the very beginning, but without

God's vision they are destined to plateau and eventually die. There are at least eleven reasons for this.

A Vision Clarifies Direction

A characteristic of far too many North American ministries in general and churches in particular is a lack of direction. They simply don't know where they are going, and many have not even thought about it. In *Leadership*, George Barna wrote of pastors and vision, saying that "only 2% could articulate the vision for their church." He concludes, "That's one reason so many pastors are ineffective; they don't know where they're going."¹ If they do not *know* where they are going—a lack of mission—then surely they cannot *see* where they are going—a lack of vision. The problem with not knowing or seeing where you are going is that you are liable to wind up just anywhere, and "just anywhere" will not do in today's world that is so desperately in need of God's direction.

A critical question that every church and parachurch ministry must ask and revisit at least once a year is the *directional* question, Where are we going? Or better, Where does God want us to go? Where is he leading us? The answer is both the ministry's mission and vision. The mission determines what the direction is, while the vision, in particular, concerns what that direction looks like. It is important that leaders such as pastors and their people both know and see the future of their ministries. Why?

Leaders must be able to articulate what God has called them to do. Not being able to do so is to invite disaster. Some people will follow a so-called leader who does not know where he is going, but the result is that they all wind up in the proverbial ditch. Also, a leader cannot develop a plan to implement the ministry without a clear target. As someone has said, "If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time."

On numerous occasions leaders in the Bible demonstrated a leadership based on clear ministry direction. Moses demonstrated his

acute knowledge of God's direction for the people of his generation when he appeared before Pharaoh and demanded their release (Exod. 5–11). Nehemiah demonstrated that he knew precisely where he was going when he presented his vision to King Artaxerxes (Neh. 2:5).

The people who are a part of the organization must also know where it is going. People cannot focus on fog. If God's people are to accomplish great things for him, they must know what it is they are setting out to accomplish.

Most people who are a part of a ministry organization fall into one of three problematic categories of ministry direction. The largest category by far consists of ministries that have no vision and thus no idea where the ministry is headed other than to love people. Most often they are maintenance ministries that are headed nowhere. Neither the leaders nor the members have any direction. If the organization is a parachurch ministry and dependent on outside funding, it will soon die. However, if it is a church, it may continue several years in this condition until the majority of the members die off and there is no one to replace them.

Another problematic category consists of ministries with multiple directions. These are organizations led by a leadership team in which each member has his or her own unique vision for the ministry. One may envision an evangelism orientation for the ministry. Another may envision a discipleship orientation. While there is nothing wrong with any of these visions, an organization can sustain only a single ministry vision. Usually a ministry with multiple visions ends with a split. Actually the split was already cooking on the back burner from the very beginning of the organization; it only needed sufficient time to boil over and cause a major ministry disaster.

A final problematic category is ministries with a single, clear vision. In this case, the problem is that the vision is the wrong vision. An example would be a parachurch ministry whose vision is the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20; Mark 16:15). While many parachurch ministries have sprung into existence because of some

major inadequacy in the church, this does not mean that God intends to replace the church with the parachurch. By definition the parachurch is to minister alongside the church, not in place of the church. And it may focus on some aspect of the church's vision, such as evangelization, but will not embrace a Great Commission vision that includes evangelism and much more.

Another example would be a church whose vision is not the Great Commission but some element of the commission. For example, one church is known in a community for its in-depth Bible teaching, another for its outstanding pulpiteer. A third church has a reputation for a strong family ministry, while a fourth has an outstanding counseling program. These attract people to what I call "bunny hop" or "consumer" Christianity. Many times the result is transfer growth—populating the larger churches at the expense of depopulating the smaller churches in the area. Another result is that people shop around the various churches according to present felt needs without any commitment to a particular body.

By way of contrast, early in his ministry Nehemiah made a point of communicating a mission and a vision to the people under his leadership, the remnant in Jerusalem, so that they would know precisely where they were going (Neh. 2:17–18). Joshua did the same shortly after he replaced Moses as the leader of Israel (Josh. 1:10–11).

A Vision Invites Unity

Scripture places great emphasis on the importance of unity among God's people. Indeed, God has sprinkled passages on unity throughout the Bible (Ps. 133:1; Rom. 15:5; Eph. 4:3, 13; Col. 3:14). An institutional vision is one of the critical components of unity in ministry. The vision affects at least two areas of organizational unity.

The first area of unity is the recruitment of ministry personnel. A vision signals to all who desire to be a part of the ministry precisely where that ministry is going. It is a portrait of the ministry's future.

This gives potential participants an opportunity to both examine and determine their own personal visions in light of their gifts, passions, temperaments, talents, and abilities. They can decide in advance if their personal vision closely matches the organization's direction or whether they should look elsewhere for ministry opportunities. In either case, this recruitment protects continued ministry cohesion because it heads off potential problems before they are conceived and brought into the ministry.

The second area of unity is the retention of ministry personnel. When there is a common vision, there will be harmony on the ministry team. New Testament ministry is team ministry (see, for example, Acts 11:22–30; 13:2–3, 5; 15:40; 16:1–3).² A good ministry team consists of richly gifted people with diverse personalities who make significant but different contributions to the ministry. This is the reason wise leaders will recruit staff members who have strong gifts in areas where the leaders are less gifted. The problem is that this diversity supplies the fuel for potential conflict among those on the ministry team. Each temperament has a different perspective on life and, therefore, a different opinion about how things should be accomplished.

The solution to this problem is a clear, single ministry vision. Vision functions as a cohesive factor; it holds the team together. The team consists of people who are creatively different, but a major reason they joined the team initially is because they held passionately to the same vision. If the vision is nurtured carefully, the result is that each person appreciates and values the other because he or she sees how each, though different, is necessary and contributes in a unique way to the accomplishment of their vision. They realize that they all need each other if anything significant is going to take place. This, in effect, mirrors such passages on the importance of diversity within unity as 1 Corinthians 12:20–22 and Ephesians 4:15–16.

Vision is vital to another area of the retention of ministry personnel. If regularly communicated, the vision serves as a constant

reminder to those in the ministry of the direction they have agreed to pursue together as a team. This is important because life is full of changes. Often people and ministries change and adjust their direction. Clarity of the vision gives the people who make up the organization a chance to reevaluate the organization's direction in light of their own gifts and personal direction in life. If the forecast is eventual disharmony, a person can seek another opportunity more in line with his or her own vision. But whether a person contemplates joining the organization or is already involved in that organization, a clear knowledge of ministry direction best enhances organizational harmony.

A Vision Facilitates Function

Another characteristic of many ministries today is that they do not know what they are supposed to be doing. They do not have a biblical mission. Others have strayed, having chosen maintenance over mission. For example, one denominational executive was overheard saying sarcastically, "The church is organized for the 1950s, and if the 1950s ever come again, we will be ready." This is especially true of the church in North America and Europe. If the typical business in the marketplace did not know what it was supposed to be doing (and some do not) or strayed, then it would not last long before going out of business. Some shrewd observers of American Christianity feel that for all intents and purposes the church has all but gone out of business.

A question that every ministry must regularly ask and revisit is the functional question, What are we supposed to be doing? Your vision, as well as the mission, answers this question. What the vision does uniquely for the ministry is to paint a portrait of what God intends for the ministry to accomplish so that all can see it.

The answer to the functional question for the church is the Great Commission. In Matthew 28:19 Jesus commands that the church

“make disciples.” This involves moving people from prebirth to maturity—from raw paganism to a compelling Christlikeness. Prebirth refers to that period of time before the new birth (John 3:3). The church is to pursue lost people, win them to Christ, and then move those new and the older disciples to spiritual maturity. But what does this look like? Vision communicates all this but does so pictorially. It provides people with a picture of what this process looks like. This is critical because if people cannot see it, then it probably will not happen.

A Vision Enhances Leadership

A question on the minds of many in ministry is, Where are the leaders? North American Christianity is facing a time in its history when many older Boomer leaders who have served well in the church at home and on the mission field are reaching retirement age. The question thus becomes who will replace them? The answer is today's Millennial generation and that of tomorrow. But what is essential to this new leadership? What will mark them and others as leaders?

One answer is vision. Developing a vision and then living it vigorously and authentically are essential elements of leadership. I define a leader as a godly servant (character) who knows and sees where he or she is going (mission and vision) and has followers (influence). That describes not only the Savior but also his disciples and those who ministered in the early church as recorded in Acts.

This definition reveals several characteristics. First, godly servants are people who display Christlike character throughout the ministry organization. They are people of integrity who exhibit the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) and engender trust. They are in ministry not because of what it can do for them but to serve others on behalf of the Savior. Second, they know and see where they are leading their ministries. They have a dynamic mission that enables them to know where they are going and, most important, a clear, energizing vision

that helps them see that direction. Third, the result of godly, Christ-like character and a powerful, compelling vision is influence. And it is influence that attracts and catalyzes followers (a good one-word definition of leadership is influence). When a congregation has a leader who owns a vision and powerfully lives that vision in a Christ-like manner, they will follow that leader to the ends of the earth.

A Vision Prompts Passion

One of the problems that leaders face in their ministries—especially in today’s smaller, struggling churches—is the mediocrity problem. They are not giving enough attention to what they do and how they do it. For example, Sunday mornings tend to be poorly planned and poorly executed. I recall how in one church, the person leading worship rushed in just a few minutes before the service and asked, “What hymns should we sing this morning?” The church constantly faces this temptation in dealing with its people.

Over a period of years, the church can allow itself to lapse into a maintenance mentality—it just seems to be getting by. Over time this leads to ministry mediocrity. Every Sunday it is business as usual. The people come to church but may seem to be going through the motions. When they leave, not much has happened to them and not a lot takes place spiritually in their lives during the week. The younger generations will not tolerate this, and many are leaving their churches, searching for greener spiritual pastures. A major reason for all this is a general absence of passion for the church and its ministry.

Vision and passion work hand in hand. While *vision* is a seeing word that involves what leaders see in their heads, *passion* is a feeling word that involves their emotions—what they feel in their hearts. Passionate people are those who feel strongly about something. The “something” in this context is the vision. An exciting, compelling vision fuels passion. When leaders get a vision from God and they see what their churches could be and what he has in mind for the

ministry, something marvelous happens—that vision usually results in a virile, infectious sense of passion. Not only do people know and see what they are supposed to be doing, but they can feel it as well. And if enough people catch the vision and experience this passion, it is possible that the ministry can re-create itself to become more effective in mission. An example of a vision-impassioned leader was Paul, who was so inflamed by his vision of preaching the gospel where Christ was unknown (Rom. 15:20) that he was willing to be cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of Israel—that they might know Christ (9:3–4).

A Vision Fosters Risk Taking

A shared vision fosters risk taking by a congregation. People with a compelling, passionate vision are willing to take risks that they might not otherwise take. While this is especially true in ministries such as church or parachurch planting, it applies to other ministry situations as well.

When the point person or lead pastor casts the vision, everyone knows what needs to be done—they can see it in their heads. That is not the question. The question is, How will we accomplish it? Sometimes you know the answer, but more often you do not. Consequently, ministry for Christ becomes an exciting venture of faith into the mystery of God's unknown. You may attempt something for Christ that does not work. However, rather than throwing in the proverbial towel in despair and walking away, you attempt something else and it does work. Though much of what you are doing is experimental, it is not ambiguous. The vision makes it clear to all the reason you are doing it. It is for God and the Savior.

People are not asking for guarantees. Most are aware that no guarantees exist, yet they are committed to Christ and the ministry anyway. The risks are great, but so is the God they serve as well as the vision he has given them (Rom. 11:33–36). How else can we explain

the early church and what God accomplished through them, or those believers who make up the faith hall of fame in Hebrews 11? They all were willing to take vision-engendered risks.

A Vision Offers Sustenance

Ministry can be very difficult, even painful. Just ask those who minister on a full-time basis. Discouragement and disappointment can lurk in the ministry hallways and boardrooms of the typical church or parachurch ministry. It is not beyond the enemy to incite persecution against Christ's church (Acts 8:1). Spiritual warfare comes with the ministry territory (Eph. 6:10–18). Many have risked or given their lives for the Savior and the furtherance of the gospel (read Hebrews 11).

The list of martyrs for the cause of Christ is extensive. But what has sustained Christians, from the beginning of the church in the book of Acts to the church today? What has kept people like Paul, Peter, James, Calvin, Luther, the Wesleys, Billy Graham, and many others on track? One answer is a clear, biblical vision. It encourages people to look beyond the mundane and the pain of ministry. It holds a picture in front of them that distracts them from what is and announces loudly, "This is what could be." All the trouble and grief that we experience in this world while serving the Savior are trivial compared to the importance of what we are attempting through him and for him. That picture carried in our mental file is one of God's means for sustaining us in the worst of times.

A Vision Creates Energy

Not much happens without an inspiring, compelling vision. Not much was happening in Nehemiah's day. The people had no vision. Jerusalem lay in ruins, and no one was motivated to do anything

about it (Neh. 1:3). Then along came Nehemiah with a mission and a vision from God to rebuild the gates and walls of the city.

Visions are exciting and energizing—they energize people. They strike a spark—the excitement that lifts a ministry organization out of the mundane. They supply the fuel that lights the fire under a congregation; they enable leaders to stop putting out fires and start igniting fires. A vision from God has the potential to turn a maintenance mentality into a ministry mentality. And when your vision resonates with your values and mission, it generates the energy that fuels the accomplishment of the ministry task.

How does a vision generate such energy? One way is that it inspires people. The vision of people coming to Christ or developing spiritual maturity touches them and moves them to action. They realize that the total transformation of one's life toward Christlikeness is what ministry is all about (Col. 1:28–29). Also, the dream challenges them. Many have languished in ministry because no one has challenged them to charge the enemy's fortresses. Many are caught up in what is, and no one has cast a vision of what could be. A leader with a compelling sense of vision from God challenges people to get up and move out of personal mediocrity and accomplish something meaningful for the risen Savior.

A Vision Provides Purpose

The right vision creates meaning in people's lives. It gives them a sense of divine purpose in life—of being a part of something great, something bigger than themselves that God is accomplishing at this time and place in history. And it is something that will bring glory to him.

With a shared vision, people see themselves not just as congregants or pew warmers, taking up space, but as a vital part of a church that is exerting a powerful impact on a lost and dying world. They are not simply in a church taking a walk; they are on a crusade. They are

part of a revolution that has the potential to change this world—to have a wonderful impact for Christ.

What does this look like? If you were to ask a person what he or she does in church, some would answer, “I am a teacher of adolescents.” However, others involved in the same ministry would answer, “I am changing the life course of a class of adolescents who will someday accomplish great things for Christ.” What is the difference? The latter have a vision that brings a sense of purpose that, in turn, gives meaning to their lives. They see the big picture and how they fit into it. The result is commitment and dedication to God and a sense of personal significance that is found only in Christ.

A Vision Encourages Giving

An often ignored truth in ministry circles is that a vision is the key to people’s giving of money. Many organizations attempt to raise funds by appealing to their constituency on the basis of need and not vision. The problem is that most people are not motivated to give to meet needs. If need motivated giving, then most people would be givers and most ministries would not have any financial shortages.

Wise donors view giving as a serious investment of God’s money. Many donors view giving to ministries that constantly appeal primarily on the basis of need much the same as investing in an organization that is in the red. People do not want to give regularly to bail out a ministry that faces or has been inundated with debt. They question the reason for the debt. Does this mean the ministry is no longer making a difference for Christ? Is there any future for this ministry?

People are moved to give to organizations that project an exciting, well-articulated vision of what they believe is God’s future for them. The vision says the ministry is not static but dynamic. It is going somewhere. It is not hopelessly trapped in the cobwebs of yesterday’s

debts but is focused on the exciting possibilities of the future. Vision communicates that while God is doing something exciting now, the best is yet to come.

Not only does vision motivate people to give of their finances or treasure, but it also encourages them to give of their time and talent. Both are critical to the life of any ministry organization. Most ministry organizations depend heavily on volunteers. Yet today's generation is so short on extra time for ministry that they are not able to use their talents for ministry effectively. They cherish their time and, therefore, many will give of their treasure before their time and talents when actually all three are needed.

After Nehemiah communicated his vision, the people of God responded not only with their treasure (Neh. 7:70–72) but also with their time and talents (detailed in Nehemiah 3). Most likely this happened because vision ultimately affects people's values and felt needs. People find time in their busy schedules for that which matters. Nehemiah's people valued the concept of rebuilding the city gates because their dilapidation symbolized the spiritual decline of Israel at that time. People also respond to visions that address their felt needs. Nehemiah's vision found his people in dire need of deliverance from their distress and reproach (1:3).

ELEVEN REASONS
VISION IS IMPORTANT

1. Clarifies direction.
2. Invites unity.
3. Facilitates function.
4. Enhances leadership.
5. Prompts passion.
6. Fosters risk taking.
7. Offers sustenance.
8. Creates energy.
9. Provides purpose.
10. Encourages giving.
11. Motivates the congregation.

A Vision Motivates the Congregation

Perhaps one of the most important reasons if not the most important reason that vision is so important to a church is that a good vision motivates the congregation with a desire to pursue and realize the

church's mission—to make disciples. My observation is that today more churches have a mission statement than churches did in the late twentieth century. Somehow along the way, they are picking up on the importance of knowing where they are going. So I am not surprised when consulting with a church to discover that it has a mission. It may not be a good one, and no one may be able to recall what it is; nevertheless, they and others like them can proudly produce what for them is a mission statement.

Simply having such a statement alone does not mean that a church will make disciples. They must address the question, Are we merely a church with a vision, or are we a truly visionary church? Something must excite and motivate people to want to realize the mission, and that something is the vision. This is so important to the church's future that I cover it more in depth in the next chapter, where I define a vision.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. This chapter presented eleven reasons a vision is important to a church or parachurch ministry. Did it convince you of the necessity of having such a ministry vision? Why or why not?
2. Did any of the eleven reasons seem more important than the others—at least to you? If so, which ones? Why?
3. Would any of the eleven reasons for a vision help your ministry? If no, why not? If yes, how?
4. There are other reasons a vision is important. What are some that come to your mind or came to your mind as you read this chapter? What other reasons would you add to the list?