



freshexpressions

changing church for
a changing world

4

mission shaped ministry

MEMBER'S HANDOUT
vision and call





LEARNING OUTCOMES



At the end of this session you will understand:

- The importance and role of vision
- The effect of clear vision on the establishment of a project
- How vision connects to call/vocation
- How vision is caught, tested against Christian wisdom and developed
- How to pursue vision - some practical steps

We hope you will be able to apply the insights above in either:

- a) engaging in a process of seeking clear God-given vision for responding to their mission opportunities which may involve developing a fresh expression, or
- b) understanding, clarifying and expressing the vision for a mission response or fresh expression that they are already working to see fulfilled.

Everyone in the group will be encouraged to take steps to apply the insights from the session in developing their understanding of the call of God on their lives

We hope you will be able to understand and apply key questions to aspects of the vision that you hold or are developing:

- Are any steps needed to clarify and confirm the vision?
- Has the vision been effectively communicated to those involved?
- Is the vision "owned" by all the key individuals in their context?
- Have they the necessary permission to pursue this vision?
- What are the next steps that need taking in pursuing the vision?

Introduction

The opening sessions of the course have focussed on:

1. The course itself, how to get the most from it and different learning styles
2. The general mission context and the need for fresh expressions of church in a mixed economy
3. The mission of God seen in Scripture which is the deeper motivation for developing new forms of church

We now turn to the importance of developing vision for fresh expressions of church as a key component in the process before turning to the practicalities.

"After that, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea and also to the Gentiles that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance" Acts 26.19-20



"In the month of Chislew, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capital, one of my brothers Hanani came with certain men from Judah and I asked them about the Jews that survived, those who had escaped the captivity and about Jerusalem. They replied, "The survivors there in the province who escaped captivity are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates have been destroyed by fire." When I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven" Nehemiah 1.2-4



In both of these passages the vision is the foundational element in the person's call.

Every Christian disciple is called to be share in the wider vision for God's kingdom and to "mind the gap" between that vision and the reality around us.

It is tempting to retreat into the church and neglect this costly engagement with the world around us. It can also be tempting to retreat into the world and give up on God's church and the possibility of change.

To live with this tension is at the heart of what it means to be a disciple of Christ.

Within that wider vision of the kingdom of God and the mission of God which we explored in the last session, God calls and gifts the church and individual Christians with particular visions for projects and pieces of work. This is our main focus in this session.

4



vision and call

WHAT IS VISION?

"The art or faculty of seeing"

"Foresight, an appreciation of what the future may hold"

"Vision is a picture of the future that produces passion"

(Hybels, Courageous Leadership, p.32)

"A clear mental picture of a better tomorrow given by God which moves a person to believe that it not only could be done but should be done" John C Maxwell

"Vision is what enables leaders to "see" the possible future further and more clearly than others, to be better than others at identifying opportunities and possibilities, and knowing how to respond to forthcoming events or likely situations. Vision is an essential hallmark of all the great leaders; it marks out a Moses or a Joshua, a Samuel or a David or a Nehemiah." Tom Marshall (from "Understanding Leadership")





Where are you now in developing vision?

Which of the following do you identify with most?

- We are not even on the starting blocks

- We are just coming to grips with the possibilities of fresh expressions but have no specific ideas

- We have a glimmer of a vision for something for a particular group

- We've been developing a vision for some time

- We are part way through seeing a vision come to reality

- We had a clear vision once but it's not worked out the way we hoped



mi What does vision do?

Where there is vision:

- Shared direction
- Faith and passion
- The capacity to energise everyone towards the same goals
- The continuous involvement of new people
- Effective sharing of tasks and responsibilities
- Sacrificing short-term convenience for long term gains
- Common reference point for resolving conflict

Where there is no vision:

- Ministry is likely to be reactive and short-term
- Conflicts of expectation and direction
- Co-operative work is difficult

"Where there is no vision, the people perish" Proverbs 29.18 Authorised Version



The vision for the mixed economy church.

"I've talked quite a bit about the church of the future as a mixed economy, meaning by this that there is no one kind of church life that captures everything, that does every kind of job. There are new kinds of parish life; there are new kinds of work with teenagers, new kinds of work for that matter with pensioners and others. So there is already a huge amount going on. Our job is to join in, to give it the encouragement it needs so that it will grow in the right way".

Archbishop Rowan Williams

Some examples of vision

"In the late 1800s two brothers, Wilbur and Orville Wright, announced that "the age of the flying machine" had arrived. Ten years of disappointing experiments followed. But on December 17, 1903, the Wright brothers made history when their small biplane lifted off a sandy beach in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. The age of air travel was born".



"In the 1940's a young evangelist named Billy Graham had a radical dream. He and a few college buddies envisioned packed stadiums where people far from God could hear the proclamation of the gospel. As of this year (2002) 210 million people have heard Billy Graham preach live while over one billion have heard Dr. Graham present the gospel via television and radio".

"And who can forget 1963? Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. and painted a picture of a world without prejudice, hatred



or racism. 'I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character'.



These examples are from Hybels, Courageous Leadership p.30

Vision in Fresh Expressions of Church

The team at Legacy XS were inspired by a vision of creating a meeting point and place for Christian community among young people in Essex. That vision led to the building of a half million pound skate park and the establishing of a youth congregation.



The team at Messy Church in Portsmouth were inspired by a vision of an all age congregation for parents and children meeting during the week in a time and place that was accessible.

The team at Taste and See were inspired by a vision and challenge of creating church in and for the coffee culture. They were aware of the gap between what the church actually was and people in their community in their 20's, 30's and 40's.

These examples are from the Expressions DVD

THE MAN WHO PLANTED TREES



4



vision and call

Story Jean Giono; Producer/Director: Frederic Back

What strikes you most about the film?

What did you learn about vision?

HOW DOES VISION GROW AND DEVELOP?

1 - Prayer

The first element in the climate in which vision emerges is prayer. Scripture teaches us that seeing clearly is difficult as is catching a clear vision of God's work and God's future which can energise others. We therefore need to be praying individually and together and continually reflecting on the vision.

It is important to be realistic that even in a context of prayer, vision is often born out of struggle and conflict and unexpected ways.

Example from Scripture: Nehemiah prays continually as he is catching a vision for what God might want him to do in Jerusalem.



2 - Refining your sense of what vision is



Each question is vital to developing a vision for a fresh expression of church. God gives us different criteria for success.

- Where is the horizon?
- Does the vision belong to God?
- Does it look below the surface (valuing the immeasurable)?
- Does it have gospel perspective (dying and rising again)?
- Is there a rhythm of fruitfulness and rest?

These questions are reviewed in this extract from Steven Croft, *Transforming Communities* pp. 38-41 on the following pages:

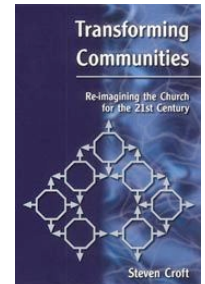
4. Ask: "What kind of vision are we seeking?"

Something strange has happened to the word vision in our contemporary society. At its root is a rich theological seam, present throughout scripture, concerned with "seeing clearly" and seeing as God sees in terms of both the present and the future. Such vision is recognised as difficult to attain and as a gift from God: think of the story of Balaam, Elijah's servant, Jesus' teaching about the parables, Simon Peter's declaration about the Messiah or the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Vision in scripture can be as much about the present as the future.

In the modern world, this term vision, with all its depth of meaning, has been borrowed from the language of theology by the language first of politics then of business and management. As it has come to be used by the latter, the word has, understandably, attracted a much simpler meaning: that of a plan or picture of the future for a business, charity or organisation. Because the term is used primarily in a commercial or secular framework, the term vision is more closely connected to an imagined future and linked to the concepts of continuous growth and increased revenue. Vision was once the preserve of prophets. It w has more to do with the generation of profits.

As the church has recognised the need to adapt to a changing world, Christians have begun to use the term vision again for the recasting of an imagined future for the church. The word "vision" is one which sits very comfortably, of course, in the Christian vocabulary. However, much of the time when the word is used, the meaning seems now to be taken from the business world not the Christian tradition. The word "vision" has come to mean, therefore, for the churches, an imagined future which, nine times out of ten, has to do with a future picture of the continual growth and influence of a particular local community or denomination.

The term vision is not the only piece of theological language to be used by the business community and therefore to be subject to this devaluation through being borrowed and borrowed back. "Mission" has been treated in a similar way. The terms "charismatic", "steward", "servant", "community" and "transformation" are all found in the secular leadership texts. It is the term vision, however, which has lost the most in the translation and whose biblical content and meaning needs to be recovered by the churches as we re-imagine what it means to be church. The



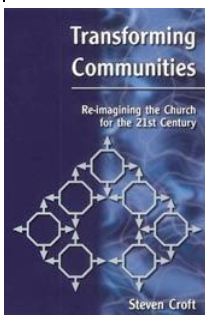
danger is that we reduce the calling to be the people of God to the kind of vision which is appropriate for a commercial company, with all that this implies. In thinking about the process of developing fresh vision, it is therefore important to ask what may make a Christian vision for the church different from a vision for any other organisation and to repossess some of the content of the biblical concept. Some of this material will be explored in more detail in part two of the book. However, it is important to note the following points here

Horizons

In the commercial world, the vision generated is normally simply for the benefit of the organisation and its shareholders or employees. For the church, the vision must be for the benefit and blessing of the whole world, not simply for the Christian community or any particular part of it. Our horizon must be on the kingdom of God rather than the extension of influence of a congregation or denomination.

God's vision

In the world of business, organisations attempt to generate and discover their own vision and plan for the future. The responsibility of the church is not simply to generate ideas (although there is a place for human creativity) nor to invent something but discover the vision which God has for the church as a whole and for a particular local congregation. That vision will be a mixture of what we are called to be and what we are called to do. I have referred already to the picture of the risen Christ tending the seven lampstands in Revelation 1. We might think also of the story of the Exodus: God guides his people not only in the general particulars of the journey but also the specifics through a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night



Looking below the surface

In the world of business organisations, the emphasis is understandably upon what is measurable (profitability; number of patients treated, numbers of students enrolled). In the biblical tradition of vision, there is a parallel emphasis on what is unseen and immeasurable. Numbers have some value, especially where they represent people, although there is certainly a tradition in scripture which warns of the danger of being deceived by them. However, the hidden qualities and virtues in a person or a nation are prized more highly than public appearance or success. What is outwardly successful may be inwardly impoverished. Travelling well is more important than arriving first. Well attended and effective worship services mean little without right conduct:

"Take away from the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

The perspective of the gospel

Vision in business and organisations is likely to be about protecting their own interests and extending their own influence: saving their life and gaining the world. Jesus says to his disciples (individually and corporately):

"If any want to become my disciples, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"

The heart of the Christian gospel is the death and resurrection of Jesus. At the centre of our Christian faith is the message of the Son of God giving up his life and being raised up when it seemed all had failed. That is also to be the pattern for the church. A vision which says we must die in order to live and invest ourselves in that which unlikely to yield any obvious return is a different kind of vision from the normal business model but is closer to the pattern and priorities of Christ. The perspective of the gospel also yields the truth that the barren can give birth, the wasteland can become a fruitful garden and what is dead can rise to new life. In the economy of

4



vision and call

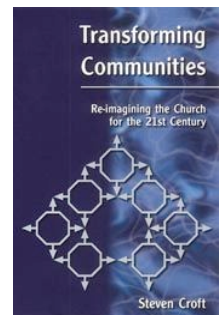
God, we should expect the unexpected. Neat graphs about future trends (whether positive or negative) are unlikely to be realised. The weak are to be nurtured back to life, not discarded: "...a bruised reed he will not break and a dimly burning wick he will not quench...."

Achieving the right approach to the possibility of fruitful ministry is vital for individuals and the churches. There are large sections of the church which are so influenced by cynicism and failure that they find it difficult to accept that churches and Christian ministry can be ever be fruitful and effective. Yet there are other sections of the church which will happily swallow the camel that continual growth and success is a necessary part of proclaiming the gospel and validates whatever

methods are used. The truth lies somewhere between the two.

The rhythm of growth

The models of vision taken from the commercial world operate largely on the hypothesis that continuous growth and development is possible for any organisation. I suspect the idea of continuous growth is a mythical ideal even in the world of economics and organisations. It certainly does not transfer easily either to individuals or to human communities such as churches. Growth in a person is more likely to come in periods of crisis or change than to be spread evenly over the course of a lifetime. The story of the Exodus is not a story of even progress towards a goal but a kind of three steps forward, two steps back kind of journey in which the detours can be as important as direct movement towards the goal and the overall feel can be one of going round in circles (which is much more like the experience of many churches). We need to question the idea that individuals and communities can sustain continual meaningful growth over long periods of time: the experience is likely to lead to overextension, burnout, retreat and exhaustion as it is to real progress. We are human beings! We need times for rest and reflection as well as times of focussed action: green pastures and still waters as well as steep and rugged pathways. Churches, like people and vines, need seasons of rest and renewal as well as seasons of growth.



3 - Listening to the Context and Nurturing the Picture

Vision is found in the gap between the two.

A biblical example: the Church in Corinth. In the early part of 1 Corinthians, Paul looks at how things are in terms of relationships within the body of Christ. There is massive division, fighting and quarrelling. In the later part of the letter he holds out an ideal from God about how things are meant to be in the image of the body of Christ (12) and the pictures of love in the community (13). This comparison of the ideal and the real creates a gap in which a vision emerges for how the church in Corinth can move forward and what it needs to put right.



For a present day example: the mission shaped church report. Our observation and analysis tells us that the church is not connecting or communicating the gospel to much of society. Our reflection on the ideal takes us back to Jesus command to "Go and make disciples" and build the kingdom of God in every part of the community. In this gap between the real and the ideal a new vision has emerged to plant fresh expressions of church.

How do we catch the vision?

Once we are aware of this gap, catching the initial vision from God may come through:

- Reflection with others
- Scripture
- Dreams or specific visions from God
- Rebellion
- Facing the truth about what is not working
- Difficulty
- Words of wisdom, knowledge or prophecy/
- Through other Christian leaders
- Through circumstances working together
-
-

4 - Test, weigh and refine the vision

Visions normally get better as you test them out in conversation with others and through further prayer and questioning from supportive but critical friends.



At each stage you need to be prepared to refine and revise what is developing.

Remember that the testing needs to include trying it out on:

The people you are aiming to serve

Example: a group with "vision" to serve a community by offering a parent and toddler group might test it out in the area and discover that there are very few carers at home with

children during the day. However they might find out that there is a demand for support in parenting skills and also for Saturday morning activities for parents and young children.

The people whom you will serve with

Example: a group may birth a vision for a midweek congregation after school based around craft activities. The original vision may be for a congregation which meets every week and draws on a pool of talent in the existing church. However, once the group tests out its ideas on those whose gifts would be needed it finds that a weekly event will be impossible to sustain so the vision is refined to a monthly gathering.

The people to whom you are responsible

Example; a group may birth a vision for a church plant in a neighbouring community. Further investigation reveals that this would conflict with the ministry of other churches in the area who are already planning something similar and are further down the track. The group may have to consider whether their call is to go ahead in a different area or to join forces with the new venture.

There may also need to be the kind of testing and challenge where people ask us honestly whether this is of God or for our own benefit or self aggrandisement

The mission accompaniment and coaching offered through Mission Shaped Ministry will also be a key element in guiding you through the vision process.

Sometimes this process of refining vision is not easy for the person who had the original idea.



4



vision and call

Sue Hope, Canon Missioner in Sheffield Diocese, writes:

"I have often observed a pattern which emerges in the life of those who receive a vision from God to do something - and that is a process whereby the vision is purged of the 'ego' of the originator/s of the vision. For example, someone has a vision of starting an outreach and shares it and sometimes a PCC/church leadership will say, 'Yes but not yet'/Yes, but it needs to be shared with a wider group and not just be about you... Sometimes when the vision is shared among a wider group, it changes - other people enlarge, refine the original idea. This can be painful for the original person/persons. But the process is one of letting the grain of wheat of the original idea fall into the ground and die. It is not 'the possession' of the visionary. When it dies, it then bears much fruit."

5 - Communicate the Vision clearly

A good test of a vision is whether you can write it down and communicate it clearly within the group and to others.

Again, we will do some more work on this in the session on Listening for Mission but some projects may be at the point of needing to do this now.



Remember throughout this process that catching and communicating vision can be painful (remember Nehemiah's lament), difficult and demanding.

The same groups are important: those whom you hope to serve; those who will serve with you and those in authority.



REFLECTION TOGETHER ON DEVELOPING VISION



What is your current vision for your own discipleship and ministry?

What is your current vision for a fresh expression of church (if you have got that far)?

Where do you need to develop it further?

Prayer

Refining your sense of what vision is

Listen to the context and nurture the picture

Refine, weigh and test

Communicate

What are the three practical next steps?

BIBLIOGRAPHY



For a good general text books which survey the field see

Richard E. Daft, *Leadership Theory and Practice*, The Dryden Press, 1999, Chapter 5: Leadership Vision and Strategic Direction.

Gary Yukl, *Leadership in Organisations*, Fifth (International) Edition, Prentice Hall, 2002, Chapter 10: Leading Change in Organisations

For a very different perspective on leadership and vision look at:

Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science, Discovering Order in a chaotic world*, Berrett-Koehler, 1999.

In terms of biblical study, Nehemiah is a classic text often used to teach on vision in leadership. You may also want to explore more some of the vision passages in Isaiah we looked at in the last section and Raymond Fung's classic, *The Isaiah Vision*.

Most Christian leadership books have a section on vision.

One of the best (sadly now out of print) is John Finney, *Understanding Leadership* (Daybreak, 1989).

Bill Hybels is superb on leadership of all kinds. See Chapters 2 and 3 of *Courageous Leadership* (Zondervan, 2002). Bill and Lynne Hybels, *Rediscovering Church* (Zondervan 1995) especially Chapter 10 is fascinating and readable.

Walter Wright, *Relational Leadership, Paternoster*, 2000 has a very good chapter on vision and hope.

Malcolm Grundy, *What's new in Church Leadership*, Canterbury Press, 2007

See also Steven Croft, *Transforming Communities*, DLT, 2002, Chapters 1 and 3.



FURTHER REFLECTION

1 - Journal ***

Write down in your journal for the course:

Three visions which have inspired you in your life (these might related to a work context; a church context or the wider world).

Your own vision for the fresh expression of church which you are developing or called to develop - even if this is at an early stage.

2 - Reading

*** Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*, Chapters 2 and 3

*** Barbara Glasson, *Mixed Up Blessing: a new encounter with being church* (DLT, 2006); this is a readable and lively account of the founding of the "bread church" in inner city Liverpool, part of which is on the Expressions DVD.

**** Raymond Fung, *The Isaiah Vision*, WCC publications, Geneva, 1992

3 - Bible Studies ***

Nehemiah

Read through the Book of Nehemiah and the story of the rebuilding of the wall.

Can you find the different elements in building a vision described in the session? What new insights do you learn from the story?

4 - Prayer and Reflection **

In dialogue with your learning partners or core team, think about the particular community you may be called to serve in establishing a fresh expression.

According to your own stage of development you may want to do one of:

1. Decide how you will listen to the reality and nurture the picture
2. Write the vision down for the first time
3. Test it out and refine it on those you are seeking to serve, those you are working with and those to whom you are responsible