

Do You Really Believe in Your Vision?

*Only If It Does Not Ask Too Much of Me
A Travel Free Learning Article*

By

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I arrived at the church early for a meeting with the team working on financing the relocation of the congregation to a new, much larger site where they can handle the growth they have already experienced, and continue to grow in response to their expanding context. I sat down in a classroom to wait for the meeting to begin.

That provided a few minutes for me to ponder the desired outcome of the meeting, and the role I could play as an outside consultant in helping them see a way forward when they primarily see ways not to move forward. Caution reigns supreme. And to a certain extent it must be present. However, it cannot be the winner if this congregation is to reach its full kingdom potential.

There would be challenges. Not everyone in the room fully believes in the project. Some see the church as primarily a business organization and their faith goes only to the end of all known and verifiable facts. They do not know how to inject the God factor into the dialogue. They have no obvious spiritual component to their perspective.

There would be more challenges. This relocation had already been the focus for several years. Some progress had been made. Setbacks had also been experienced. The relocation initiative had already been around long enough that stories of the recent past at times dominated the conversation more than did hopeful imagination about the future potential through the relocation.

Very quickly it came to me that the answer is one I have been providing to them since the first time I came to meet with them. They have a great vision that is focused on evangelism, attracting new members, assimilating them into the congregation, developing them as believers, and engaging them in missional action.

But Do They Really Believe in Their Vision?

Is it a statement, or is it a movement of God by which they have become captivated? Is it deeply felt by the leadership of the congregation? Is it broadly owned by the followership of the congregation? What are the signs that every decision of the congregation about the relocation initiative or other matters revolves around how the vision can be fulfilled? Individuals wonder, "Is it asking too much of me?"

Is the vision something that helps the church feel satisfied with themselves for having such a challenging vision statement? Or, is the vision something that calls the leadership and followership forward to prophetic and leading edge ministry? What does the vision ask of each individual? Individuals wonder, "Is it asking too much of me?"

What transitions and changes does living into the vision require? How can the congregation make these transitions and changes while at the same time affirming what is familiar and meaningful to individuals and groups in the congregation about the past to present ministry and culture of the congregation? Individuals wonder, "Is it asking too much of me?"

Will leaders still have the same positions of recognized authority as the congregation goes through the transitions and changes? Or, will their roles shift, become less visible, and perhaps less influential? Will it negatively impact their self-esteem or control tendencies? Individuals wonder, "Is it asking too much of me?"

How much is too much? “Do I really believe in the vision?” More than one leader asks, “Am I willing to make the transitions and changes necessary?”

What is Vision?

We need to remember that vision is not a fifteen word or less statement crafted in a back room by a committee, printed on the worship folder, memorized, and then recited on cue. That is a vision statement. Any similarity between a vision statement and true vision is purely accidental.

Vision is a movement of God that is memorable rather than a statement of humankind that is memorized. We cast and cast vision until we are captivated by it.

Developing a vision statement is not a difficult task. Becoming captivated by that vision is the hard part. Believing the vision is God pulling the congregation forward into the future rather than simply an organizational prediction of the future is the hard part. Consistently living into the vision is the hard part.

How Can I Tell If My Congregation Really Believes in Its Vision?

Here are seven ways to tell if your congregation really believes in its vision:

1. Leaders and followers are more excited about the vision the congregation is seeking to fulfill than the past it is seeking to sustain. They talk more about the joy of moving forward under God's leadership into unknown places rather than the comfort of home where we bring our burdens to God. They willingly take up their cross and follow Jesus in the direction of their full kingdom potential.
2. Leaders and followers engage in vision casting whenever appropriate. They will tell just about anyone about their excitement concerning what God is doing in and through the congregation. Often their vision casting is missional in nature that talks about how the congregation is impacting the world outside the doors of their church facilities rather than how their church is being successful inside the doors.
3. Leaders and followers are part of an ongoing prayer movement throughout the congregation that seeks to provide a spiritual empowerment for vision fulfillment. They realize the ultimate motivation is not in the strategies they are utilizing, but the spiritual discernment they are experiencing because of God's clear leadership.
4. Leaders and followers sacrificially give their time in specific vision fulfillment actions. Time is the most precious commodity of the 21st century, and they are willing to freely give it away in fulfillment of the vision. This time is focused on the highest priority actions that will make the most significant difference in the kingdom service of the congregation.
5. Leaders and followers sacrificially give their tithes and offerings to support the fulfillment of the vision. Out of the passion they feel for the spiritual and strategic journey of the congregation, they are willing to invest financial resources above and beyond what they might otherwise do because the potential in vision fulfillment is so great.
6. Leaders and followers engage in attractional and missional actions in the world around them. It is not really about church growth. It is about kingdom growth. They enthusiastically invite people to connect with this congregation because it is on an intentional mission. They look for ways to expand and extend the ministry of their congregation among people and places God is calling them to go forth in missional service.
7. Leaders and followers are not distracted by conflict that periodically arises. They are so focused on vision fulfillment that they are committed to dealing appropriately with conflict situations so that

they do not derail what God is doing in and through the congregation. They act lovingly towards the people negatively impacted by the conflict, pick them up, and bring them along on the vision fulfillment journey.

Does your congregation really believe in their vision? Or, does it believe in their vision only if it does not ask too much of them?

Important Things to Know

George Bullard is a Ministry Colleague and the Strategic Coordinator with The Columbia Partnership. He is also General Secretary [executive director] of the North American Baptist Fellowship of the Baptist World Alliance. The Columbia Partnership is a non-profit Christian ministry organization focused on transforming the capacity of the North American Church to pursue and sustain Christ-centered ministry. ***Travel Free Learning*** is a leadership development emphasis. For more information about products and services check out the web site at www.TheColumbiaPartnership.org, send an e-mail to Client.Care@TheColumbiaPartnership.org, or call 803.622.0923.