

Pulpit Series

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by Mario Dučić, November 2005

God always calls people to fulfill His Plan. Today we live in a world of confusion, with many people not knowing who they are and where they are going. To my greatest sorrow, I see the church and God's workers in a spiritual vacuum because of their lack of proper vision.

George Barna, famous Christian writer and analyst, in his research found that the importance of vision is significant for maintaining a healthy church life. This research has various conclusions related to church, faith and contemporary culture. Mr. Barna conducted more than 200,000 interviews with teenagers, pastors, church workers, and leaders in both the business world and governmental institutions, as well as leaders of non-profit Para Christian organizations.

Some of the conclusions are:

1. Many pastors, although good people, with a calling to do God's work, do not have a clear understanding of God's vision for their church. Subsequently, the majority of churches have very low or no influence in their communities. In protestant churches even one out of ten

pastors cannot explain God's vision for his church.

2. The majority of believers understand the concept of vision but fewer have God's vision for their own lives or the work that they are trying to accomplish for the Lord. Subsequently, many feel frustrated and fall into spiritual dissatisfaction. Church services become corrupted with selfishness and accept mediocrity. The word balance is often used to compromise some situations. The meaning of purpose and significance is fading. The solution is to know God's vision for your life and church.

3. Local Churches and Bible Colleges often do not understand and rarely implement the concept of vision. For example, during enrollment of students, with rare exception, is vision used as a selection criterion for new enrolling students, only their potential matters. Furthermore, vision is rarely used in our theological seminaries and Bible Colleges as guidelines for major subjects

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taught. Our theological institutes play a significant role in our churches but would be more efficient if they emphasized vision in the process of selecting students.

4. Elder boards within local churches would do well to lean on church vision as a filter to reexamine new pastoral candidates, but among protestant churches, only one in 20 use its vision as the key for selecting God's servants. If only God's vision had been known and emphasized, there would have been a great difference in their focus and influence.

Although there are more and more pastors and lay people in ministry who are recognizing the importance of vision for their specific calling, we should also clearly understand God's purpose for each local church. Each church should have a mission or vision statement to reach the unsaved, but beyond that, their specific calling and activities should be based on God's mission or vision for each church.

★ **We should yield to the Lord, raise our eyes, and believe that God will give us spiritual victory in our country and cities.**

Today God needs people with vision. Unfortunately, we are entering into an era in church history of even greater crisis. The church should be holding the key role in society; however, it seems powerless to influence the society in which it exists.

We should yield to the Lord, raise our eyes, and believe that God will give us spiritual victory in our country and cities.

I believe that the church should have three spiritual keys for understanding how to usher in events of the Holy Spirit.

The first key is awakening – Waking up the church is the process in which God's Holy Spirit fills spiritually dead people. It is healthy for the church to awaken, but usually does not have social implication. It brings freshness and attracts us again to the fire of our first love.

The second key is renewal - Renewal is the process where God gives revelation to the church. Through renewal we receive signs and miracles, we again awake and change according to God's character and are blessed with prophetic words. Renewal is the process of rejuvenating the heart of the church; however, it isn't our ultimate goal.

Our ultimate goal is reformation! We cannot only be awake or renewed but we

should change the society around us. We must not let the society become lawless, worldly, or just humanistic. It is time to stand up and influence the people around us! It is actually our mission to be the salt and the light to this world!

The crisis of the world today is similar to the crisis felt by spiritual leadership of Europe during the 18th Century. While the French Revolution was taking place and perverse immorality and lawlessness existed throughout England and parts of Europe, we still find young people who had God's clear vision. These young spiritual leaders knew how to save our society and turn it from disaster to God's principles.

God raised up John Wesley and George Whitfield, strong fiery evangelists who shook the foundation of society and evangelized the gospel message throughout England and America. They positively influenced their society.

In the 19th century, Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission, sent 968 missionaries to China until 1910. William Booth also organized the "Salvation Army" which greatly influenced the society of his time.

God raised up these leaders, common people, who did supernatural and

great things in order to give spiritual guidance to save the societies in which they lived. Since we have the answer, it is hoped that the church will know how to act in these last days. There is currently a great challenge on the church in America to give the right answer to the crisis that is going on in New Orleans and the Gulf States. Although a sign of God's judgment, the church should now react not only as a welfare organization but should influence the society there.

Today our Christian leaders are in a vision crisis. Families are falling apart, violence is on the rise, substance abuse is taking our kids by storm, and sexual immorality is rampant all because our churches lack strong spiritual leadership with God's vision.

The crisis can be seen in all areas of our country and the world is hungry for people with vision. Politicians are looking for people with vision, but most of all, the church is seeking people with vision. People want to have real spiritual leadership not just pastors and evangelists who are in it for the money, position, or their ego.

★ **It is actually our mission to be the salt and the light to this world!**

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God described one crisis of leadership but also a vision for that period of time. In Ezekiel 22:30, God says, *“So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one”*.

We face the same question today. Who of us will stand in the gap to defend our nation from God’s wrath? Maybe it will be you!

Are you called to face this danger and react to this crisis opportunity? The world is seeking people with a priority and vision to evangelize. It is time to start while the light still shines because there is a time of darkness coming where we will no longer be able to work openly.

► **To understand this topic, first of all, it is important to understand what a vision is?**

The late Duke Ellington, famous jazz

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musician and composer, was once asked for an explanation or definition or rhythm. He answered, *“If you got it, then you don’t need a definition. If you don’t have it, the definition won’t help you”*.

The same is true of vision. It is best if you have it, but if you don’t, here is a proverb: Proverbs 29:18 says *“Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint”*, said another way, *“Where there is no vision the nation falls apart, dies; becomes naked without clothes”*.

The Hebrew word for vision or announcement is **chazon**, meaning an intelligent mental view, picture, dream, vision, or revelation.

The word **cast off restraint** means something that runs through our fingers; denotes someone who is missing the opportunity or to a person without discipline. In other words, if you don’t have a vision for your own life, family, calling, or church, then you don’t have a course for your walk with God. You become dissipated, with things not going as you wish. You miss opportunities, become depressed, full of criticism, and spiritually you stop growing.

As to the vision for your calling, this is the best definition I have ever read: *“Vision for the service is a clear mental*

picture of wanted future given by the Lord to his chosen servants and based on the proper understanding of God, yourself and circumstances”.

The Greek word for the vision, **horama** in the New Testimony denotes something seen, a scene, view, or picture.

For example, the apostles had a vision of the transfiguration in Mathew 17:9, where Jesus commanded them saying: *“Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.”*

Further the same word can be found with the priest Zechariah in Luke’s gospel, where he had a vision in the temple. In Luke 1:22 we read, *“But when he came out, he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple.”*

In Acts 9:12, Saul before his conversion had a vision: *“And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.”*

In Acts 10:3, Cornelius, while praying, also received a vision, *“About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius!”* and in verse 19, while Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, *“Behold, three men are seeking you.”*

When Apostle Paul preached in Corinth, many were against him and the Scripture says that he left them after they opposed and blasphemed him. One night after that God spoke to Paul in a vision: *“Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent”* (Acts 18:9) When Apostle Paul defended himself before Agrippa, at the end he said: *“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision”* (Acts 26:19)

NOTHING HAPPENS WITHOUT A VISION!

When a person or a group is under the leadership of a person without a vision, the result is disorder, confusion and anarchy.

Therefore, we should have a clear vision where to go and be dedicated with all our heart to achieving the vision.

If we want to summarize we can say that a vision is a clear picture of an individual person or group of people in the future.

✦ **When a person or a group is under the leadership of a person without a vision, the result is disorder, confusion and anarchy.**

The vision brings health and life instead of sickness and death. Vision brings freedom and release to people in God's service. Vision brings love instead of hate.

When we speak of a clear mental picture, we may as well say that it is a picture that we keep playing in our mind about the outcome of the future.

A vision includes visual reality, an internal still portrait, which at this moment doesn't exist. It is not somebody else's view of the future but is exclusively your personal experiential view.

Consequently, if we want this picture to materialize to others we should draw or paint it for others to see. The same is true when you use your imagination to create a dream. You will be able to lead others in catching your vision so that you can share it with them. Therefore, it is very important to have a clear picture. An unclear perspective is not a vision.

What is important to know about vision is that it always brings change. It never keeps the status quo. The vision actually stretches the reality beyond the present status. Without a clear vision to keep people on target, you can end up with problematic church fighting and those resisting change.

The vision focuses on the future and doesn't try to reproduce the past. How many churches have been mourning about God's glory that we once had and would like to return to the past? Such churches will spiritually fall and become religious.

A lot of people have had visions. One of them was Martin Luther King Jr. who had a dream and shared it to America in 1963. Parts of his famous speech read, *"I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice... 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... I have a dream that one day all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"*

► **He had a vision!**

Nehemiah also had a vision of how to build the walls around Jerusalem, and

he was only a cupbearer to the king of Persia. The city was in captivity and a lot of it was ruined but Nehemiah had a vision to rebuild Jerusalem and its walls.

God's good servants love visions. He considers the vision day and night, tells the people around him, and then motivates the group to dedicate themselves toward the goal. He always thinks about the vision and it burns in him as described in Psalm 39:3, *"My heart was hot within me. While I was musing, the fire burned"*.

A vision gives guidelines, order, and godliness. It overwhelms and wins chaos, lawlessness, and aimlessness!

Through a vision given to the Apostle Peter by God, he understood that the gospel was not only for the Hebrews but also for the gentiles. Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit Peter gave that vision to his followers.

Dwight L. Moody received a vision to build a Biblical Institute where people called of God could study the word and become more equipped in various areas of ministry. God gave this vision and then it came true.

God gave Dr. Han Kyng Chick a vision for a church in Seoul, Korea. He shared this vision with 27 refugees and today that

church is 60,000 people strong. A church built not only by one vision but by many followers who caught the vision of Dr. Han.

People used by God, respond to the given vision – they are always obedient! God gave Noah a vision of a boat and he built it! God gave Nehemiah a vision of walls and he rebuilt it! God gave the Apostle Paul a vision for evangelizing Christ to the entire world.

If God talked to you through a vision and put a consistent yearning in your heart, then obediently follow your heart and accept God's command so your vision can come true. Dedicate yourself wholeheartedly to fulfilling your vision so God can lead you in serving those around you.

If you don't follow your vision, you will neither serve God or other people. God can give you a vision for your life and your ministry.

SECOND – WE SHOULD KNOW WHERE THE VISION COMES FROM!

★ **A vision comes from our closeness with God and by praying, reading, and contemplating God's word.**

God told Joshua, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Joshua 18:9)

A vision comes from our closeness with God and by praying, reading, and contemplating God’s word. It means that we should spend time with God in meditation and prayer. Consideration of God’s ways gives us creative strength; he gives us new ideas and details related to these ideas.

The Holy Spirit is the greatest creative person. He comes and helps us consider new thoughts. He shows us how to recreate the great things of the past in new ways for the future. God gives us, through Christ and His Holy Spirit, the strength to look at things differently for serving the people around us.

There is a price to pay when we get a vision from God!

▶ **God gives us revelation when we read and meditate on His word. He lights up thoughts and ideas!**

✦ **Our vision should have details!**

Some of you don’t have a clear picture about what you should do but I would like to tell you that you don’t have to live in confusion and disorder, but you need to pay the price with your full dedication to Jesus and then you will get a clear picture.

If you are a pastor, leader, deacon, or in any position of leadership – and you haven’t dedicated all your whole heart to your vision, then you cannot be an efficient leader. You may have a position of leadership but what separates the great leaders from the others is vision! The vision is important and is the key factor in successful leadership.

▶ **You should also know yourself!**

When developing vision you should be aware of your own capabilities, gifts, and limitations, and then pray before you begin to work toward ministry vision. The vision is not about your advancement, dreams or needs, but rather it is about God working His plan through us by using our capabilities.

▶ **What to do with a vision?**

Although it may seem impossible, we should fully believe and dedicate ourselves to the vision. Once we receive a vision we should devote ourselves to planning both short and long-term goals

to help our vision to come true.

Devotion also involves determination to overcome problems and remove obstacles that would try and hinder us from achieving success of God's vision. Sometimes, when the first sign of difficulties appear we want to give up or say, "Maybe God doesn't want us to do it because of too many difficulties".

WITHOUT GOD'S VISION FOR YOUR LIFE AND MINISTRY, YOU DRAG FROM ONE CRISIS TO ANOTHER. THEREFORE, YOU MUST BELIEVE IN YOUR VISION WITH ALL YOUR HEART, MIND AND SPIRIT BECAUSE PEOPLE WILL PROBABLY SAY THAT YOU ARE CRAZY!

When it comes to the opposition, it is crucial to know that God chose you and gave you the vision. We shall otherwise fall and be constantly in personal crisis.

Ten days before John Wesley's death, he wrote to his young follower William Wilberforce, "If God didn't choose you for this thing (opposition to slave trade) you will get tired of Satan's opposition, but if God is for you who can ever be against you".

Our vision should have details! We cannot simply say that God has called us for Croatia or America. We should have a detailed plan on how to do it! In the

Bible, God has always talked in details.

THERE ARE MANY FACTORS OPPOSING VISIONS AND BECAUSE OF THESE OPPOSITIONS MANY VISIONS DIE. THESE OPPOSITIONS ARE CALLED VISION KILLERS AND WE SHOULD ALWAYS GUARD AGAINST THEM.

Vision killers are:

1. Tradition is a Vision Killer

Tradition can ruin a good vision. Tradition cannot control the future. It may form foundations, on which we build our future, and it may serve as a bridge between past and future, but God cannot use tradition if it blocks the process.

God blesses those traditions that build and serve His church and people. Traditions are good when they serve His goals, but not if it holds back the future. God sometimes modifies tradition leading it into a new direction or updating it with relevant and contemporary expressions of the same idea.

★ **Tradition is more about reflection of the past, and vision is always a reflection of the future.**

God is not interested in the style of tradition but in its ability to attract people to it. Tradition is more about reflection of the past, and vision is always a reflection of the future.

Actually, pure maturity means to grow up beyond our past. It is good to recognize the good in past traditions. It is also good to respect a tradition and somehow use its lasting force for the future; however, tradition must not control the future.

2. Fear is also one of the vision killers.

We can become afraid when considering the implementation of God's visions. Vision always brings change and change means exiting from comfortable areas of our lives where we have no experience. We lack the confidence because God has asked us to step out in faith.

A lot of people are afraid of changes. If you move the church toward a new goal or use some new methods you surely could become afraid of failure and nobody in ministry wants a failure.

Sometimes we are overwhelmed with fears because of past failures and we are

★ **A vision requires an extreme amount of faith and strength.**

afraid to start anything new. Our mind can become occupied with failures and this limits us. If we keep focusing on our failures we miss opportunities and don't use our potential.

A fear may arise in a situation that we cannot fully control. Unfortunately, there are not many Christians and Christian leaders who come to the point of full dedication to God and allow Him to rule in each moment of their lives.

Sometimes we miss faith like a mustard seed. Consequently, we become paralyzed by fear, limited in our capabilities to take new paths of God's glory.

Vision replaces fear with new strength and hope. It releases unfaith and distrust and replaces it with peace and safety. Vision sometimes has questions but no doubts. If you have fear, recognize it and pray. Believe in God! He can do what He wants to do.

3. Stereotype.

You don't have to imitate, compete, or try to be somebody else. You should be what you are. Pray to God for your own vision and to find your own way. If you imitate others you will face crisis in your life and will always be changing ministries and churches. You should seek

God and see and hear what He is trying to tell you.

Stereotype is usually used as a shortcut to the truth. God's vision for your ministry should be based on truth. The truth requires that you see for yourself the reality of the world that we live in, then try to find the answers of truth that lie within. If we follow stereotypes, they will lead us toward wrong decisions. If we follow God's vision for our life then we will produce good fruit. If only our thoughts and hearts could be cleared from wrong perceptions reflected in stereotypes.

4. Self-satisfaction

We sometimes do not serve with passionate activity. We are self-satisfied or don't care about our service to God. Some think and say, *"Regardless of what we do, God will bless our effort"*. This statement is typical for people who are half committed about a vision. God is interested in how we carry out His vision. Surely, God has and wants passion and energy. His passion toward people is obvious in His actions through Jesus Christ. Examples of passion can be found in many of God's servants.

Once our passion is extinguished we don't have the momentum to carry out the battle against the powers of

darkness. Actually, satisfied people without passion toward God may be the next victims of spiritual battle.

While you are considering your vision, test your passion and energy for it. Are you ready to give up everything to realize it? Do you take care of your relationship with God so you can fulfill His vision? Is your church so religious that the chances for fulfillment of vision are very tiny?

If you seriously wish to serve God then identify people whose hearts are lukewarm and compromising. Avoid them so that they do not become an obstacle to your vision.

5. Tiredness is also a vision killer.

Ministry is not easy. If you think that serving God is easy, then it means that you have never properly served. People often think that pastors and full-time workers have a lot of free time; however, their lives are full of tasks. The truth is quite different, we have to fight for free time and learn how to rest in the Lord.

Jesus also had his time to rest and be alone. If it is difficult to have passion for your vision, then check whether you are driving without fuel. A vision requires an extreme amount of faith and strength. There is no sense in looking for a vision while you are exhausted.

Exhaustion will simply limit your vision and the influence that you will have on your surroundings. Many churches don't know how to rest. Many people become opposed to the vision because they are in constant arguments. They try to go to spiritually high places without proper rest. Therefore, they simply don't want to participate in spiritual events because they don't have the energy and strength to fulfill their vision. If we get tired we cannot effectively lead the body of Christ.

It is therefore, wise and good to find time for quality rest and give people opportunities to take some time off. When we are rested and refreshed mentally, emotionally, and spiritually we can go to great lengths.

6. Short-time considerations

People with short-term thinking often say, *"If we can't complete this within a two-year time... better not even try!"*

★ God called us neither to short-term devotion nor to short-term thinking!

Today, many pastors and leaders are only interested in short-term considerations. It is a shame that we don't consider long-term thinking.

According to God's nature, His vision is always on a long-term basis. The vision usually outlives the bearer of the vision, because God's goals are eternal, not temporary. His timing is most often different than ours. God is not bound to earthly time as we are.

Instead of expecting quick results, it is better to have great dreams and always be trying to be a basis for change in both lives and society. What does it mean to be successful in God's service? Some things need time! God called us neither to short-term devotion nor to short-term thinking!

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