

Freeing Vision for People of Faith

The Biblical book of Proverbs is highly recognized for its profoundly wise sayings. One such declaration says: *“Where there is no vision, the people perish.”* (Proverbs 29:18) While this statement can apply to individuals, it actually speaks of interactive groups. When any gathering does not maintain a common vision, a purpose and view of life beyond individuality, their interaction eventually ceases and they perish as ‘a people’. (Matthew 12:25)

So why is a vision such a good and righteous thing to embrace? Visions provide viewpoints that can elevate our perspective and experience. A vision of better life brings people together in marriages, fellowships, and nations. Visions generally have a spiritual quality that helps us overcome past experience, early perceptions, accepted norms, natural limitations and current difficulties.

A vision can be a picture your spiritual eye sees. It can also be an inspirational thought that comes and causes you to see what you did not previously realize. Visions are inspiring moments that can improve a perception, a condition, or create something new. They can also be ignored or pursued.

While everyone seeks what is good for their life, a vision can unite us to work for the greater good. Commitments to a common vision enable a variety of gifts, abilities, and customs to function as one stabilizing factor. This is true of all types of groups like marriages, clubs, fellowships and nations. A vision even lends strength to the weak among us, because they are connected.

In Scripture’s first mention of mankind, God announced His desire to parent offspring and have a family of children. His first recorded statement regarding mankind was: *“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.”* (Genesis 1:26) The Hebrew words for “image” and “likeness” can be translated as “reflection” and “resemblance.” Our created purpose is to reflect God as a mirror and resemble Him as a child. We are all good and not-so-good reflections and resemblances of God.

So, God created the vast natural universe and a unique planet to act as a womb, a place of limitation, where He would birth, grow, teach and develop His family. (Genesis 1:1-30)

An Inspired Nation

Longing to see enlarged demonstrations of His family, God appeals to us as families, communities and nations. Scripture verifies God’s interest in nations by saying: *“He sets up and brings down kings,”* and *“determines the times nations operate and sets their boundaries.”* (Acts 17:26-29; Job 12:23; Daniel 2:21) God even establishes nationhood for *“the sake of His people.”* (2 Samuel 5:12)

History and Old Testament Scriptures record a time when God delivered a mixed multitude out of slavery with the vision of interacting as a free nation. During the Exodus from enslavement, most of the slaves in Egypt gravitated to the vision of life where they were free to live and prosper.

Despite a common perception, God’s call was not to the descendants of a single family. Think about it – the Exodus happened just four generations after 70 of Abraham’s family and servants entered Egypt. (Genesis 46:27; 1 Chronicles 6:1-3) Conservatively, counting a wife and two children for the 600,000 men of war age, there were at least 2.5 million people; truly a mixed multitude of servants! (Exodus 12:37-38) The invitation to be “My people” (Romans 4:9-16) was to all who desired to be free to live as *“a kingdom, nation”* under God’s protective leadership (Exodus 19:4-6)

Fifty days after the deliverance, the entire group heard God speak and invited them to personally interact with Him. (Deuteronomy 4:10-12; 5:1-4) Almost without exception, they said no and appointed Moses to mediate and convey what God wanted to communicate. (Deuteronomy 5: 22-27; Exodus 20:8)

The national vision needed time to settle in and change their slave concept of life under overlords. They needed time to adjust so they could own property, be responsible, and prosper as free people.

So, God planned a two year wilderness journey. Sadly, it took forty years. It was the children that grasped the full concept of faith – believing and pursuing what God directs.

Once they accepted the idea and entered the land, it was divided into 13 tribal areas. Local wise men were elected as elders and judges to consider motivation and circumstances. Their judgments sought to correct offenders and bring restoration to the offended. (Proverbs 3:12; Job 5:17; Isaiah 26:9) They functioned as one nation under God, a people free of a ruling upper class.

While people refused a personal spirit-to-Spirit fellowship with God, they were still free of a stifling two class system of overlords and servants. Much like today's middle class, they were free to live, worship, and prosper as a nation. They flourished under God's oversight for several generations.

It was 500 years after the freeing deliverance and journey into nationhood that the people chose to be like other nations with Kings. This introduced the two class system into the national experience. From then on, distress and prosperity depended on the actions and attitude of their ruling king.

As a people, they continually strayed from God's oversight. The Biblical account indicates every third generation would come under oppression because the previous *"failed to properly teach their children."* (Psalm 78:5-8) *"This people has a stubborn and rebellious heart,"* (Deuteronomy 9:6, 13; Jeremiah 5:23) who fails to heed God's caution, *"If you will...I will."* (Exodus 15:26; 19:4-6)

When a generation repented and sought God's oversight, deliverance came. The nation however, systematically failed to be the world influencing witness God wanted. They fell short of His desire for an enlarged example of His guidance that would draw others into this way of life. Because of their lack of faithfulness, the nation eventually ceased and the people were scattered. (Amos 9:8-9)

A New Kingdom Vision

Before the scattering, God said He would make a New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31) with a people who would maintain His vision of life under His guidance. The New Covenant perception of God's reign would involve writing *"His laws and ways in people's minds and hearts."* (Hebrews 8:7-13; 10:16; Mark 12:30) He would teach people how to think, act, and worship.

Sure enough, approximately 1500 years after the first visionary call and deliverance from slavery, God intervened afresh. This time focus was on what the first group refused: one-on-one interaction with God's presence. Jesus Christ proclaimed the New Covenant as the Kingdom of God.

Jesus announced that the new experience had begun (Mark 1:14-15) and the new call would not come with signs and wonders to observe for *"The Kingdom of God in your midst."* (Luke 17:20-21) Responders would be *"fruitful people,"* (Matthew 21:43) and live a more *"abundant life."* (John 10:10)

The message was loudly proclaimed: *"The Kingdom of God is at hand...His reigning presence is right here among you,"* readily available, within your grasp. (Matthew 3:2; 9:35; 10:7) The vision of God's reign in minds and hearts did not come by force; yet *"everyone is forcing his way into it."* (Luke 16:16; Matthew 11:12)

The instruction of Jesus was to *"follow me,"* (Matthew 16:24; John 12:26) my example and respond to the Father the same way *"as you see me"* respond. (John 13:15) Jesus even prayed *"That they would be as I am,"* actively following God's guidance during this natural life. (John 14:3; 17:24)

The reality and experience of this vision of God's New Covenant Kingdom reign *"would never end or cease to be in the earth."* (Daniel 7:13-14; 2:44-45) When Jesus ascended out of natural sight, he promised: *"I am with you always."* (Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5-6)

Multitudes began experiencing the *"new birth"* of awareness (John 3:3-6) and *"immersing baptisms"* in God's Spirit. (Acts 1:5; 2:1-6, 41) People began to relate to God's abiding presence in more empowering ways. They collectively became the spiritual and physical *"Body of Christ"* in the earth; a visible illustration of God's guiding presence. (1 Corinthians 12:27; Romans 12:5; Ephesians 4:12)

By this time, the response to God's first call into freedom had deteriorated into a religion of rules and restrictions, containing over 600 Laws (Jewish Torah). As leaders of the old order opposed this unmanaged response to God, Jesus confirmed Daniel's prophecy and declared Judaism's stifling oversight of God's people was ending.

The previous experience was *"becoming obsolete...ready to disappear."* (Hebrews 8:6-13) He went on to say *"that generation"* would see God's vision for My People *"transfer to a more responsive people."* (Matthew 21:43; 23:36; 24:34) To amplify the previous was no longer relevant; Jerusalem and the sacred Temple were destroyed in 70 AD.

The resurrected Jesus appeared with the look and form of the man they had known, yet he was a Spirit. Perceptions of Jesus changed from a man of God to the Spirit of God. A few days after his ascension out of natural sight, Jesus returned to immerse people in God's Spirit. (Acts 2:33, 39) Now they could understand how Jesus would always be with us, (Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5) *"disclosing himself as the abiding Spirit of the Father and Son."* (John 14:21-23)

John also declared the reality of this New Vision: *"Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them...the first things have passed away...Behold, I am making all things new."* (Revelations 21:3-5)

Acceptance of the presence of God-in-Christ with them was a vast improvement over the refusal of the first gathering. Multitudes responded and allowed God-in-Christ to be an anointing and insightful presence in their various circumstances. Despite rulers and overlords, a new class of free people arose and began to be called Christians. Like airplanes that function and soar within the limitations of gravity, people of faith learned to live Godly lives within the restrictions of their culture.

For over 300 years and many generations, believers proclaimed "God is with us!" (Romans 8:31) This New Covenant vision focused on their relationship with God everywhere they lived. While believers remained scattered among nations, God was no longer relegated to a temple or an emblem on a shelf. This reality really *"upset the world"* concept of God and His ways among us. (Acts 17:6)

Overlords Assume Control

This new class of free people responded to God's presence as their primary guide and principal source of wisdom. Local men and women, recognized as elders, discerned between disputes just like old Israel's elders and judges. (1 Corinthians 6:1-5) As partakers of God's Kingdom influence, believers and fellowships became godly examples of love and light wherever they lived.

Two and three generations following the days of Jesus, teachers began to promote the idea of men with governing authority over large areas. It was initially rejected, but eventually accepted. Once again, an upper class society was introduced into Kingdom life. Just like Israel of old, as overlords assumed power and exercised control over others, freedoms began to slip away.

In 313 AD, the Roman Emperor Constantine assembled area authorities called bishops into councils to form a standardized belief system. Following many days of arguments, official doctrines were declared and all other views and experiences were labeled heresy. The first houses of worship were built and appointed ministers were chosen to be spiritual mediators, ignoring Scripture: *"For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men...the man Christ Jesus."* (1 Timothy 2:5)

Reliance on God apart from the official belief system was soon forbidden and the concept of the *Body of Christ* dependent on *God with us* began to fade. Historical records tell us all sacred writings were confiscated in 500 AD. Reading Scripture was restricted to the ministry class. Life under God's governance shifted to controlling men and a veil seemed to come over the minds, hearts, and actions of people. Within a few generations God's presence with us, it became a forgotten reality.

Jesus Christ renewed the call into freedom as a spiritual awakening. It involved personal one-on-one experiences with the presence of God and in fellowships everywhere they lived. Eventually people of faith fell under the controlling ways of religious overlords.

We can learn a lot from these two historical calls for people of faith and their response to God's freeing vision in the Old and New Testaments. The salvation God offers involves more than blessings in eternity; it includes the freedom to be faithful people in this life. We are intended to live free of the enslaving ways of the servant/master two class system.

Are you 'waiting' for Jesus to return before you experience the Kingdom of God? If so, you are overlooking the fact that Jesus returned a few days after ascending out of natural sight, to be *with us always* 'as' the presence of God's Spirit. (Hebrews 13:5; John 14:23) God's influencing reign in the hearts and lives of people of faith has been a reality for over two thousand years.

Thankfully, the *Eternal I Am* understands this life's difficulties. Our heavenly Father patiently calls and recalls us into personal experiences and fellowships with His insightful presence.

Vision for a New Day

God began to call afresh some 1500 years after the appearance of Jesus Christ. Our Bibles provide details of the first and second calls into Kingdom life in the Old and New Testaments. They also tell of a third call into the freedom to live, worship and prosper under God's guidance. This third call for people of faith is a gathering of the "*scattered*." (Deuteronomy 30: 1-3, 6; Isaiah 43:5-7; 56:8)

Don't forget, God gave the name 'Israel' to natural people who were becoming people of faith. Scripture always refers to Israel as those who seek God's guidance. (Galatians 3:6-9; Romans 4:9-16) They were never one specific race or ethnic group. In the Old Testament He called a multitude of servants and in the New Testament He gathered 'who-so-ever will' unto His governing influence.

One prophet put it this way: "*And I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth...He who scattered Israel will gather him and keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.*" (Jeremiah 31:1, 8, 10) They were gathering unto God's presence where they lived, He would once again gather them into nationhood. When a new Continent appeared, 13 developing colonies formed a nation, under God. Soon after, freeing releases from the two class system began to form all over the world.

The vision of God's relational influence in individual lives and nations was revealed afresh but in three historical stages: A Reformation, Great Awakening Revivals, and Spirit Baptisms.

The Reformation of the 1500s began approximately 1000 years after written Scripture was removed from public access. The newly invented Gutenberg Printing Press began printing Bibles in common languages so people could read the printed word. God's written word began to shine afresh!

God revealed afresh that saving faith is not restricted to one belief system or manner of worship. People began to assemble and worship apart from the restricting ways of the established order. One delivering message was: "*Every believer is a priest before God.*" (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:5, 9) People discovered a new freedom to live and worship as they perceived God was leading.

While many reformers and people broke away from the ruling order, the assurance of God's favor in this life remained a question. The central message was: "Do your best and when you die you will find out." By the late 1600s, interest in religious services had declined significantly.

Then in the early 1700s, Great Awakening Revivals began to reveal the insight: sincere repentance allows you to *feel* God's cleansing presence and you will *know* His favor is with you. Additionally, you can be "*born from above*." (John 3:3; Ephesians 2:1) and even delivered from your habitual sinful ways. Multitudes responded and found a freeing release from the relentless religious condemnation.

The revivals drew multitudes into more of a sense of purpose. Emboldened, people began to break away from the stifling over-rule of kingships. The freedom to self-govern is now called *Democracy*.

The emerging body of Christ in the earth began to function as a new *middle class*. Once free of restricting overlords, people began to produce new products and services for personal income and a new economic system developed called *Capitalism*.

The unparalleled freedom to live, worship, and prosper as we perceive God is leading has inspired the creation of many new conveniences, modes of travel, and sources of communication. Life under God's guidance began improving the spiritual and natural lives of people all over the world.

In the 1900s, baptisms in God's Spirit began revealing to multitudes His desire to be more than a feeling and a knowing in this life. Our Bibles say early believers were 'filled' with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:4) The Greek word translated as "filled" means to 'fill as a sponge'. It is appropriately illustrated at the crucifixion when a sponge was filled with vinegar. (John 19:29; Mark 15:36)

Baptizing immersions in God's presence allows us to absorb, like sponges, aspects of His character, attitude, and personality (CAP). Our absorbing experiences in His presence enable us to receive the enabling gifts, anointing, and revealing insights God wants to share with us. These experiences can be emotionally overwhelming and they can be quiet inspirational moments. Rather a filling as a vessel, we absorb from God's presence often lest we, as sponges, dry out.

The prophet Ezekiel reported a vision he saw. In the vision God's voice spoke of three gathering and empowering developments. (Ezekiel 37:1-14) The first directive was, "*call the scattered bones together*" giving them a cohesive purpose as skeletons. Then, "*cover the bones with flesh*," making them natural people. Lastly, "*breathe the spirit of life into the valley*," so they become spiritually inspired and equipped as an army with a cohesive purpose and the ability to defend themselves.

Did you notice how God's three activities in Ezekiel's vision relate to the three revelations of the last 500 years? The Reformation of the 1500s revealed a gathering response to God's call (bones). The Great Awakening revivals of the early 1700s revealed faith was relatable to this natural life (flesh). Spirit Immersions of the 1900s draw many into a more active fellowship with God (spirit).

As individuals and gathering people, we can know and experience God within and outside of one religious system. As repentant people we can experience a rebirthing awakening to God's forgiving favor. We can also experience life improving immersions in God's presence for He is always available. His loving mercies are boundless, beyond our ability to exhaust. (Romans 11:33; 8:35-39)

Inspired and Improving Influence

Visionary people perceive there is clearer truth to know, insight to receive, and more to experience both naturally and spiritually. Visionaries not only see and perceive; they actively work through the complicated details. They are often called explorers, discoverers, inventors, entrepreneurs, parents, and reformers. Some are even known as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

As we experience spiritual, mental, and emotional releases from strict oversight, we can perceive and see more clearly. Previous insight can remain relevant if it does not restrict more light. As a mid-day sun adds to the morning dawn, all revealing insight prepares us for new awareness.

Remember, God's purpose in each of our lives has always been natural 'and' spiritual. Yes, men complicate this truth by dividing God's purposes in our lives into one or the other. Life in this world is intended to include our full involvement as natural people who are inspired and led by the Spirit of God. Just as the enslaved multitude that came out of Egypt, we are natural people gravitating to the promise of a better life in this world, not just for an after-life.

For the last 500 years, people have gathered to live free of the two class system with its privileged upper class and devalued under class. Today, we can personally experience one, two, or all three of God's calls to gather under His leadership and live natural lives responding to His guidance.

The emerging worldwide prosperity was measured in research by British Economist Angus Maddison. He illustrates that historically until the 1820s, 94% of the world's population lived in abject poverty. His research found that in 2015 only 9.6% still remain in such abject poverty. As people of faith, we are free to live and prosper so that everyone benefits. This is a fulfillment of the promise God gave to Abraham, the father of the faithful. (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:6-9; Romans 4:9-16)

God loves all of His offspring even when we ignore Him, are hesitant to hear His voice, stray from His guidance, respond as silly children, or are not religious. We want to realize that God's Kingdom in this earth is not intended to be a utopian state or states of perfection. It includes a host of variables; from different ethnic origins, several colors, many languages, and various belief systems.

Jesus described God's Kingdom experience in Matthew's chapter 13 as: *"Full of mystery,"* (v. 11) yet *"a hearing and understanding that becomes fruitful."* (v. 19, 23) It is *"a costly treasure"* (v. 44-46) and can *"appeal to everyone."* (v. 47) It is *"spread as sowing seed"* (v. 24, 31) and *"expands to affect everyone it touches."* (v. 33) God's reign in the earth also *"includes divisions and stumbling blocks,"* (v. 36-43) while pursuit of its experience *"brings righteousness, peace and joy."* (Romans 14:17)

Everyone responds to God's guidance differently; *"as shallow, joyful, worrisome, and some become fruitful."* (Matthew 13:18-23) In His Kingdom there are *"tares among wheat, yeast among flour, hidden treasures, a dragnet drawing both good and bad fish."* (Matthew 13:24-55) There are *"goats among sheep, wolves clothed as sheep, and people building on sand."* (Matthew 25:32; 7:15, 24-27)

The vision God gives for a Kingdom is not confined to one religious or denominational approach. It is an ever expanding and improving reality that allows for different levels of response, even times of rejection. God's revealing vision for people of faith is not limited to one nation but is experienced by all who seek to *"do the right thing."* (Hebrews 10:24; Romans 7:12) God welcomes our imperfect response and encourages improving adjustments.

The Light of God's Ways

Salvation invites us to actively *"work out"* into our personal and national lives *"what God is working into us...and appear as lights in the world."* (Philippians 2:12-15) We are then able to help others. We cannot be complacent and assume God will fulfill the vision without our involvement.

Remember; *"our faith in God is as dead (useless) if not supported by our righteous works."* (James 2:20, 26) We must be involved and counter bad policies lest our inactivity unwittingly complicates the blessings God wants to shower on us. *"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery."* (Galatians 5:1)

Will we proactively choose to continue under God's guidance as free people? If so, we must teach our children to refuse the deception that wants to 'take care of us' and eventually enslave us. When the vision for living together under God's guidance is ignored, forgotten, or dismantled, strengths that are featured in our gatherings are weakened.

Our life improving responses to God and His ways, although far from perfect, are very visible in everyday life. When we share our light as different perspectives and discuss issues under a common vision, we can be an overcoming force. (Isaiah 1:18; 43:26) This is why we need to share our light with one another as unifying 'factors', so we can all see more clearly.

Who among you is wise...Let him show by his good behavior...the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits. (James 3:13-17)

The level of light we are designed to project can be kept a secret, as *"hidden under a lamp shade"*. (Matthew 5:15-16) God prefers, even in our partiality, to *"let your light shine."* Sharing discussions tend to produce greater clarifying light. As the light in us shines brighter and brighter, (Proverbs 4:18) levels of darkness are dispelled and evil extremities that seek to divide us cease to take control.

God want us to be proactive in our limitations and imperfection: *“Arise and shine for the glory of the Lord has risen upon thee...the Lord will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you.”* (Isaiah 60:1-3) Jesus encouraged us to: *“Let your light shine (where?) before men (how?) in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father.”* (Matthew 5:16)

While you may not have realized the Kingdom of God is actively functioning in the earth today, it does not negate its reality. The freedom to live, worship and prosper with liberty and justice for all is a God given vision. Many nations function as beacons of liberating light to the oppressed.

While we are thankful for the quality of life God has blessed us with, things can always be better. Let us continue to press for the better. This is a Kingdom principle that requires us to focus more on what God ‘is’ saying and doing and less on the shortcomings of His instruments.

Fresh insight into the freeing and enabling vision for our day brings us into broader experiences of God’s influencing and inspirational oversight. God calls us to respond beyond individual responses with the vision to be groups, communities, and nations. Together, we are able to do the promised *“greater works.”* (John 14:12)

Are we *feeling* and *living* the truth that God is with us, among us and in our midst? How well are we *hearing* and *seeing* God’s involvement in our lives as visionary peoples? How can we be better examples of God’s character, attitude and personality (CAP)?

Let us exercise our right to choose the better and let our influencing voice be heard and counted. This is a peaceful and powerful way to counter the efforts of all enemies of God that are bent on dividing and destroying our gatherings as fellowships, states, and countries.

“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8)

May we continue to hear and respond to God’s vision for life as a people and impact our world!