

PASTORAL VISION

FROM THE 2ND CENTURY TO THE 20TH, A CONSISTENT
WITNESS – VISION!

T. M. MOORE

A PASTOR TO PASTOR RESOURCE



The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Introduction

Welcome to *Pastoral Vision*, 28 days of meditations from church leaders throughout the century, all focusing on important facet of the work of ministry – vision.

Few things are more important in tending the flock of the Lord than that pastors and shepherds have, maintain, inculcate, and use a clear, compelling, expansive, and Biblical vision of the life of faith. The Lord's sheep will follow where we lead them, and if we don't have such a vision, then we're like to lead them almost anywhere other than where the Lord intends.

Pastors and shepherds must work hard at this aspect of their ministries, beginning with their own vision for the life of faith in the Kingdom of God. Then they must project the Lord's vision for His people into every aspect and facet of their ministries, and of the ministries of those who serve with them.

These meditations from various church leaders can help us understand why the Scriptures are so urgent about gaining and casting the Lord's vision for our work.

Incorporate these brief meditations into your daily devotions. Share them with your church leaders or other pastor friends. Let this great leader from our Christian past speak into your present, and listen as the Spirit of God leads you to fan into flame His calling on your life.

The entries in this, as in every *Pastor to Pastor* study, are arranged for a month of readings, one reading per day followed by a series of Questions for Reflection or Discussion at the end of the week.

We're happy to provide these readings at no charge for you to use, personally and with your staff or church leaders. Please feel free to make copies for your leadership team or to forward the link or PDF to as many people as you like. If you find these meditations beneficial, we hope you'll consider making a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe to help support this and our many other outreaches to the Church.

We hope you will find this study helpful and encouraging as you continue the Lord's work in building His Church, His Body, His Bride.

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Week 1, Day 1

No Spiritual Life?

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3.18

Lectures to My Students

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“Whatever his natural gifts, whatever his mental powers may be, he is utterly out of court for spiritual work if he has no spiritual life; and it is his duty to cease the ministerial office until he has received this first and simplest of qualifications for it.”

I have worked closely with pastors for nearly thirty years, and it never ceases to surprise me to learn that many – perhaps most – of the pastors I’ve known have a very shallow spiritual life. They don’t pray much. Their time in the Scriptures is all business – getting ready to preach. The practice of spiritual disciplines is a now-and-then, on-again-off-again activity. They have almost no sense of spiritual vision and very little excitement in their walk with the Lord. No wonder the flocks of God are so marginal to life in our society. Everything in pastoral ministry – like everything in life – begins in vision. We are *never* living up to the limits of our abilities, not if we have dwelling within us a power Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we could ever ask or think (Eph. 3.20). But we are *always* living up to the level of our *vision*, and if our spiritual lives are flagging, the way to improve them begins with a clearer, more compelling, more *desirable* view of the life of faith, life in the Kingdom of God and Christ.

Pastor, is your spiritual life what it ought to be? Are you drinking deeply and lingering long at the Fountain of grace and truth? Is your vision of the Christian life leading you daily to greater depths of immersion in Christ, and greater heights of glory and joy in Him?

Week 1, Day 2

Reserved for the Great-hearts

Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. 1 Corinthians 16.13

Lectures to My Students

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“To face the enemies of truth, to defend the bulwarks of the faith, to rule well in the house of God, to comfort all that mourn, to edify the saints, to guide the perplexed, to bear with the forward, to win and nurse souls – all these and a thousand other works beside are not for a Feeble-mind or a Ready-to-halt, but are reserved for the Great-heart whom the Lord has made strong for Himself. Seek then strength from the Strong One, wisdom from the Wise One, in fact, all from the God of all.”

The people we shepherd will gain a sense of what’s in our heart by the vision we pursue, the energy we invest in building the Church, the gentleness – yet firmness – with which we care for them, the intensity of our disciple-making, the fervor of our preaching, and the consistency of our evangelism. It takes a great heart from God to accomplish such works infectiously, and God stands ready to grant such a heart to those who seek Him for it. But it takes a great and growing vision of God, and daily immersion in that vision, to gain the *heart* for God that ministry requires.

What would you describe as the characteristics of “the Great-heart”? How do you nurture your vision of the greatness of God?

Week 1, Day 3

Truly the Children of God

Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be; but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. 1 John 3.2, 3

The Instructor

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215 AD)

“Truly, then, are we the children of God, who have put aside the old man, and stripped off the garment of wickedness, and put on the immortality of Christ; that we may become a new, holy people by regeneration, and may keep the man undefiled.”

Pastors must lead their churches by vision, as Jesus led His disciples. That vision must include both what we see for the members of our churches, as they mature into holiness, and what we see for our churches, as they grow in unity and maturity as the Body of Christ. In each case, no better model can serve to inform our vision than Jesus Christ Himself. We must not allow our vision of Christ to be informed by Christian pop culture – songs, art, preaching, and the like. God has painted out the portrayed of Christ in His glory throughout the pages of His Word (Jn. 5.39). Only when we seek Jesus there, comparing spiritual things with spiritual things in the Spirit of God, will we see Him truly as He is, and begin to be like Him (1 Cor. 2.12, 13; 2 Cor. 3.12-18).

If we do not have a vision for the people we serve and the church as a whole, where will we lead them? What is your approach to improving your vision of Christ exalted in glory?

Week 1, Day 4

Look to the Unseen King

For it is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4.6

1 Clement 36

Clement of Rome (fl. ca. 90-100 AD)

“This is the way, beloved, in which we find our Saviour, even Jesus Christ, the High Priest of all our offerings, the defender and helper of our infirmity. By Him we look up to the heights of heaven. By Him we behold, as in a glass, His immaculate and most excellent visage. By Him are the eyes of our hearts opened. By Him our foolish and darkened understanding blossoms up anew towards His marvelous light. By Him the Lord willed that we should taste of immortal knowledge, ‘who, being the brightness of His majesty, is by so much greater than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.’”

Conformity to Christ is the goal and end of the Christian life (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Jn. 3.2, 3); it is also what the Body of Christ should be striving for together (Eph. 4.11-16). So Clement, following Paul, points the churches in Corinth to the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ exalted, and calls on them to fix their desires and aspirations there. Scripture provides many excellent glimpses of our exalted King – Revelation 1 and 14, Psalms 2, 45, 110, for example – and by practicing meditation on these passages we can get a better sense of what God wants to do in and through our lives and our churches. You aren’t what you *eat* or *wear*; you *are* what you behold.

What role does the vision of Christ exalted play in your personal life, your ministry, and your church?

Week 1, Day 5

Through Mercy to Clarity of Vision

...tha the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe...
Ephesians 5.17-19

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“Here he eagerly exercises the love of his neighbor and perfects himself in it; and now, filled with hope and fortified in strength, when he arrives at the love of his enemy he ascends to the sixth step, where he cleanses that eye through which God may be seen, in so far as He can be seen by those who die to the world as much as they are able.”

Conviction and pleading for mercy help us to recover a proper sense of love – for our neighbors, and even for our enemies – which brings even more clarity to the eye of the heart, so that we can see the pure vision of our exalted King even more clearly. We cannot see God with the eye of the heart (understanding) as long as the depths of our hearts are clouded with sin. Studying of God’s Word, seeking the vision of Christ, is a spiritual and mystical endeavor. Augustine is merely describing his own experience in the light of the teaching of God’s Word. Reading, studying, and meditating on God’s Word are for the purpose of seeing Jesus with eye of the heart, and knowing Him better, first of all. And in this work, mercy toward others will help us to grow in our vision of Jesus our King.

How do you understand what Paul describes in Ephesians 1.15-23? Is this your consistent experience as you turn to the Word of God?

Week 1, Day 6

To Rule Our Hearts

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.” Deuteronomy 6.5

Sermons on the Ten Commandments

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“Now do we abstain from all wrong? Have we ever caused our fellowmen any offense? We have to come to the heart [of it], which prevents us from regulating and submitting our life in obedience to God. For God did not merely provide a civil law in order to make us live honestly, but he provided a law in conformity with his nature. We know that he is Spirit and wills for us to worship him in spirit and truth. That being the case, it is crucial for us to realize that he has not only ordered our hands and our feet, but also our affections and thoughts.”

The Law of God reveals both the character of God and the love by which He intends us to live. Obedience that Law brings true blessing begins within. If we do not love God and His Law, we will not learn it, much less obey it. If we truly love Him and His Law, with all our heart, mind, and strength, then nothing will be able to keep us from living out the requirements of His Law in humble obedience. The pastor’s job is so to proclaim the greatness and beauty and wonder of our God, as revealed in His Law and all His Word, so as to entice the people to desire Him. For when they truly desire Him, then they will willingly take up the study of His Word.

In what specific ways of late have you helped the people of God to gain a clearer vision of His greatness and beauty?

Week 1, Day 7

Humble and Heavenly-minded

Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.... 1 Peter 5.2, 3

Christ the Example of Ministers

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

“The ministers of Christ should be persons of the same spirit that their Lord was of: the same spirit of humility and lowliness of heart; for the servant is not greater than his Lord. They should be of the same spirit of heavenly-mindedness and contempt of the glory, wealth, and pleasures of this world: they should be of the same spirit of devotion and fervent love to God: they should follow the example of his prayerfulness; of whom we read from time to time of his retiring from the world, away from the noise and applauses of the multitudes, into mountains and solitary places, for secret prayer, and holy converse with his Father...”

Christ came as a Servant, His mind fixed unswervingly on His Father and His Father’s will, and His back bent daily to meet the needs of those around Him. No one can be said to be following Christ Who does not assume this same posture and focus. God has called shepherds to serve His flock by the example of their humility and heavenly-mindedness, just as Jesus did. We must not allow the cheap thrills of worldly attention or rewards to influence the work and business we do in the name of the Lord.

Are your spiritual disciplines sufficient to help you nurture a clear and compelling heavenly vision? How does that affect your ministry? Would your people describe you as humble in the service of the Lord?

For reflection or discussion

1. What is the function of vision in the life of faith? In the work of pastoral ministry? What does vision do for us?
2. The focal point of all our vision should be Jesus Christ, exalted in glory? Where would you counsel a new believer to look in beginning to nurture that vision?
3. What are some ways pastors and shepherds can keep the vision of Christ before the people they serve? That is, how can we work the vision of Christ into the various facets of our ministry in the church?
4. How can pastors and shepherds encourage and assist one another in living toward the vision of Christ?
5. What are your goals for this month’s meditations? What do you hope to learn?

Prayer:

Week 2, Day

To Love the Spiritual Country

Oh how I love your law!

It is my meditation all the day. Psalm 119:97

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“But all this is duly executed by a ruler [a pastor or shepherd], if, inspired by the spirit of heavenly fear and love, he meditate daily on the precepts of Sacred Writ, that the words of Divine admonition may restore in him the power of solicitude and of provident circumspection with regard to the celestial life, which familiar intercourse with men destroys; and that one who is drawn to oldness of life by secular society may by the aspiration of compunction be ever renewed to love of the spiritual country.”

Pastors need daily time for meditating on Scripture, apart from any of their work of preaching and teaching. It often happens that a pastor’s time in the Word becomes so commingled with his preparations that he fails to hear the voice of God speaking to his own soul. We must ever renew our vision of the unseen realm and listen in silence as the Spirit, using the Word, teaches us what we must do to further prepare for our journey to eternal glory. Only as we see the “spiritual country” as our true home will we bring our lives and work into conformity with the expectations and powers of citizenship there.

How would you explain your practice of meditating on Scripture to one just beginning the work of shepherding or pastoral ministry?

Week 2, Day 2

An Influence and a Check

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days

That the mountain of the LORD’s house

Shall be established on the top of the mountains,

And shall be exalted above the hills;

And peoples shall flow to it. Micah 4:1

The Christian Ministry: Part I, chapter I

Charles Bridges (1794-1869)

“What an extensive medium of pouring forth the light and life of the Gospel upon a benighted world! What a vast and valuable body of moral influence would it spread throughout its widely expanded sphere! How would its wise and kindly control of ‘the madness of the people’ impose a check even upon the political convulsions of the earth! And what an unlimited flow of national, social, and individual blessing would be communicated to our own, and to every land through this divinely-appointed channel!”

In a course on pastoral ministry once my students were complaining about the pastors they had known and observed in churches – they didn’t seem very energetic or fruitful. “Is this the best we can do?” asked one. Then another asked, “Do you think pastors are working up to the level of their ability?” I answered, “No, I don’t. Most pastors are very gifted and eager to serve. They do not lack ability or desire. But they are working, many of them, up to the level, not of their *ability*, but of their *vision*.” We need more pastors and shepherds with vision like Charles Bridges and Micah, people who see the potential of the Kingdom the promise of the Church as the hope, not only of lost souls, but of all culture and society.

Can you summarize your vision for your church in a brief sentence? Put succinctly, what do you expect to be the impact of your church in its community and the world?

Week 2, Day 3

Good and Evil

*“See, I have this day set you over nations and over kingdoms,
To root out and to pull down,
To destroy and to throw down,
To build and to plant.”* Jeremiah 1.10

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“Thus the expositor and teacher of the Divine Scripture, the defender of right faith and the enemy of error, should both teach the good and extirpate the evil. And in this labor of words, he should conciliate those who are opposed, arouse those who are remiss, and teach those ignorant of his subject what is occurring and what they should expect.”

Preaching has a negative and a positive component. The preacher, filled with the Holy Spirit, must strive to attain conviction of sin on the part of his hearers; otherwise, the work of the Spirit in their lives is not likely to get far (Jn. 16.8-11). At the same time, the preacher must cast a vision and point in new paths that will urge the hearers on in the pursuit of holiness. Thus auditors can lay aside the old person and take up the new, pressing on as they do into greater Christlikeness (Eph. 4.17-24).

Do your preaching and teaching contain both of these components? How would you summarize the promise of salvation?

Week 2, Day 4

Leading to the Precipice?

And He spoke a parable to them: “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch? A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.” Luke 6.39, 40

The Book of Pastoral Rule

Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604)

“There are some who investigate spiritual precepts with cunning care, but what they penetrate with their understanding they trample on in their lives: all at once they are teaching the things which not by practice but by study they have learnt; and what in words they preach by their manners they impugn. Whence it comes to pass that when the shepherd walks through steep places, the flock follows to the precipice.”

The Apostles acknowledged three tools to be in the toolbox of the pastor: The Word of God, prayer, and personal example (Acts 6.4; 1 Pet. 5.1-3). These need to be used in balance. We cannot shepherd the flock of God by the ministry of the Word alone. Nor will prayer, or prayer and the Word alone, enable us to fulfill the noble task of shepherding. We need to live the life of faith with vision, joy, power, courage, consistency, and holiness, so that what we preach and how we pray will lift the flock we serve to the heights whereon we dwell.

How does your own personal example figure into the work of making disciples in your ministry? What vision of the Christian life does your life communicate to the people you serve?

Week 2, Day 5

A Road, not a Dwelling

But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. Hebrews 11.16

Sermon V

Columbanus (ca 543-615)

“What then are you, human life? You are the roadway of mortals, not their life, beginning from sin, enduring up till death...So you are the way to life, not life; for you are a real way, but not an open one, long for some, short for others, broad for some, narrow for others, joyful for some, sad for others, for all alike hasting and irrevocable. A way is what you are, a way, but you are not manifest to all; for many see you, and few understand you to be a way...Thus you are to be questioned and not believed or warranted, traversed, but not occupied, wretched human life; for on a roadway none dwells but walks, that those who walk upon the way may dwell in their homeland.”

What kind of vision for the spiritual life do we cast for the people of God? Do we consistently point them beyond the daily grind to the greater, unseen realities of that heavenly landscape with which we are continually surrounded? Do we urge the saints on to a clearer vision of those unseen things which are the North Star of our existence? We must not allow the people in our care to mistake this present life as the end towards which their faith is moving. It is a way, that's all. It can be a glorious way, whatever comes across our path, but only in the light of that City toward which we are journeying.

How do you nurture your own sense of spiritual vision? What difference does this make in your daily walk with the Lord?

Week 2, Day 6

Revival Leads to Awakening

Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. Acts 6.7

An Humble Attempt

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

“Thus after the inhabitants of many cities of Israel, or of God's professing people, have taken up and pursued a joint resolution, to go and pray before the Lord, and seek the Lord of hosts, others shall be drawn to worship and serve him with them; till at length *many people and strong nations* shall join themselves to them; and there shall, in process of time, be a vast accession to the church, so that it shall be *ten* times as large as it was before...”

In Acts 6 the church in Jerusalem appears to have been slipping into a bit of complacency, at least, lethargy, in the area of caring for its needy. But the apostles and the people together renewed their love for the Lord and one another in such a dramatic and visible way, that the Word of the Lord kept increasing beyond the church, and many of its most ardent detractors became obedient to the faith. When God revives His Church and renews His people in His love, the effect of that will necessarily impact everyone and everything in their lives. Revival, in short, leads to awakening.

How do you, in your preaching and teaching, seek to cast a vision for revival and awakening in your church and community?

Week 2, Day 7

Rivers of Living Water

“He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” But this He spoke about the Spirit... John 7.38, 39

An Humble Attempt

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

“The Scripture gives us great reason to think, that when once there comes to appear much of a *spirit of prayer* in the church of God for this mercy, then it will soon be accomplished...Spiritual *waters* and *rivers* are explained by the apostle John, to be the *Holy Spirit*...It is now a time of scarcity of these spiritual waters; there are, as it were, *none*. If God’s people, in this time of great drought, were but made sensitive of this calamity, and their own emptiness and necessity, and brought earnestly to *thirst* and *cry* for needed supplies, god would, doubtless, soon fulfill this blessed promise.”

First we have to recognize our need. Only then will we seek from the Lord that which we lack. But it seems that many believers – dare we say, most? – consider that their Christian life is “good enough.” They like their church, they have many Christian friends, and their life as a whole is pleasant enough. Why would they want to seek for more of the Spirit of God? But if we can rouse them to consider the greater boon and glory that attend His constant filling and transforming work in our lives, their complacency may give way to a new vision, and more earnest and fervent prayer for the Spirit may ensue.

What is your own sense of what the Spirit of God wants, and is able (exceeding abundantly able, Eph. 3.20), to do in your life? Do you need to have your vision enlarged?

For reflection or discussion

1. What is the Kingdom of God? What does it mean to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness? How does that mandate factor into your work as a shepherd of God’s flock?
2. What is your church’s vision? That is, how does it see itself in your community? What does it hope to achieve?
3. Do you think the people in your church have a large and expansive vision of the Christian life? Or is their vision of the Christian life “good enough” for them? Explain.
4. Our vision must include the City to Come, Christ exalted in glory, His Kingdom coming and to come, the Church growing in unity and maturity, and individual believers bearing abiding fruit for Christ. What opportunities does the service of worship afford for nurturing these aspects of the Christian vision?
5. In which of the areas of vision that we have considered thus far do you need to improve your own vision? How might you begin to work on that?

Prayer:

Week 3, Day 1

Every Member a Builder

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry... Ephesians 4.11, 12

Institutes of the Christian Religion

John Calvin (1509-1564)

“From [Paul’s statement in 1 Cor. 14.30 ff.] it is clear that every member of the church is charged with the responsibility of public edification according to the measure of his grace, provided he perform it decently and in order.”

The goal of pastoral ministry is to build the church and thus to fulfill our part of Christ’s agenda (Matt. 16.18) within our own calling and context. Building the church, however, depends on equipping the saints, and equipping them with a vision, understanding, heart, will, and the skills for ministry in their everyday lives. If the people aren’t ministering, the church won’t grow; but they won’t minister without being equipped, and this is the work of the pastor. But the pastor is not likely to make equipping the saints for ministry *the* central component of his ministry unless he has Paul’s – and Christ’s – vision for the church and how it grows.

Would you say that every member of your church is continuously involved in being equipped for ministry and ministering to others? Should they be? Is this your vision for your church?

Week 3, Day 2

Stretching the Souls

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us... Ephesians 3.20

The Instructor

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215 AD)

“We, then, who are infants, no longer roll on the ground, nor creep on the earth like serpents as before, crawling with the whole body about senseless lusts; but, stretching upwards in soul, loosed from the world and our sins, touching the earth on tiptoe so as to appear to be in the world, we pursue holy wisdom, although this seems folly to those whose wits are whetted for wickedness.”

I love that image of “stretching upwards in soul.” Here is the way to fight spiritual complacency, by casting vision and appealing to the hearts, minds, and consciences of those we serve, that they should rest in the inward power of the Lord to become more in Christ than they have ever dared to ask or think. And do this every day. The challenge to shepherds is, first, to *embody* such a vision of the life of faith, and of our callings in the Lord, and then to *teach* it consistently, and without apology.

Why do you think God’s people have so little vision or longing for a richer and fuller spiritual life?

Week 3, Day 3

To Walk, to Lead

“Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.” John 13.16

An Exhortation to Ministers

Isaac Watts (1647-1748)

“Call your own soul often to account; examine the temper, the frame, and the motions of your heart with all holy severity, so that the evidences of your faith in Jesus, and your repentance for sin, and your conversion to God, be many and fair, be strong and unquestionable; that you may walk on with courage and joyful hope toward heaven, and lead on the flock of Christ thither with holy assurance and joy.”

The minister must always remember that, as often as he gives into temptation, falling through it into sin, he betrays the congregation of the Lord’s people (Ps. 73.15). In the same way, as often as he demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit, the tokens of love, the virtues of holiness, and the power of witness, he lifts his flock to new visions and aspirations of what they themselves can become as followers of Jesus Christ. Here again our vision of the life of faith, and of the work God has called us to do – as well as of the legacy we hope to leave behind – will determine the extent to which our example leads others to a richer, fuller walk with the Lord.

What do you think are the most important lessons of discipleship that your people learn by watching you?

Week 3, Day 4

The Larger Vision

And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” Acts 2.40

An Exhortation to Ministers

Isaac Watts (1647-1748)

“Can there be any juster cause or season to exert fervor and zeal, than while we are pleading for the name, and honor, and kingdom of our adored Jesus? Let him live, let him reign for ever on his throne of glory; let him live upon our lips, and reign in all our ministrations: Let him live in the hearts of all our hearers; let him live and reign through Great Britain, and through all nations, till iniquity be subdued, till the kingdom of Satan be destroyed, and the whole world are become willing subjects to the sceptre of his grace!”

It’s good to consider the larger, overall vision within which we conduct the work of ministry. Christ is exalted at the Father’s right hand, Who is putting all His enemies under His feet. He sends His Spirit to convict, convert, and teach His chosen people, and to empower them to bear fruit, exercise spiritual gifts, and give bold witness for Christ. He is building His Church and advancing His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, and of the increase of His Kingdom and righteousness, there will be no end! And within all that grand and glorious vision, He is making disciples who are the very embodiment of His resurrection life and power!

How would you summarize the larger vision that guides the work and ministry of your church? Do you think the people of your church share this vision?

Week 3, Day 5

As We Do and Say

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. 1 Corinthians 11.1

The Master Plan of Evangelism

Robert E. Coleman (1928 -)

“This was the secret of His influence in teaching. He did not ask anyone to do or be anything which first He had not demonstrated in His own life, thereby not only proving its workability, but also its relevance to His mission in life. And this He was able to do because He was constantly with His disciples.”

The Spirit of God within us is able to take us beyond what we’ve ever known or experienced before in the life of faith, as we have seen (Eph. 3.20). Sometimes all we need to stretch us is someone to show us what or how. This is what Jesus did, and it’s what pastors must do for the men they are equipping as leaders. Give them vision. Show them how to live and serve. Call them to go beyond themselves – not in their own power, but in that of the Spirit. At the same time, live the vision you cast and the life you hold out to them – live it in the power of Christ and His Spirit.

What is your ideal vision for what a church leader should look like? How would you describe his walk with the Lord? His character? His ministry skills?

Week 3, Day 6

Unlimited Potential

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3.20, 21

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“It is an undoubted fact that any man can attain any height that he may desire by means of steps that are properly disposed, sufficient in number, solid, and safe.”

Now here is some sound advice for Christian educators. First, nurture in learners an expansive and compelling vision of the life of faith. Teach them to think and ask BIG. Second, lay out a course of study and learning that provides a track for progress which the learners can clearly understand. Third, make sure each tie in that track is firm, and that it holds the rails and will carry them to each new stage in their progress and growth. Set clear objectives for each course in the program, and work hard to help learners achieve those objectives. Finally, provide encouragement and support at each step of the process.

Teachers need help in developing a sound curriculum and strong courses. What help is offered for them by the leadership in your congregation?

Week 3, Day 7

All Together Now

...but, speaking the truth in love, [we all] may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Ephesians 4:15, 16

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“May we all, with one accord, be moved to promote such a worthy object in every possible manner by advising, warning, exhorting, reforming, and in every way furthering the work for God and for posterity. And let no one think that he is not called upon to act in the matter. For though a man may be naturally unsuited to be a schoolmaster, or may be fully engaged by his duties as a clergyman, a politician, or a physician, he makes a great mistake if he thinks that he is on that account exempt from the common task of school-reform.”

Every member of the Body of Christ has something to contribute to improving the work of Christian education – the work of making disciples – in the local church. All are called to study, learn, and teach (2 Tim. 2.15; Col. 3.16; Heb. 5.12) and to encourage one another in love and good works (Heb. 10.24). But the pastor must lead. The pastor must cast the vision, affirm and equip the workers and set them on a course of growth and building, and point the way to a more fruitful school of discipleship in the church’s work of Christian education.

What is the next thing you need to do to begin reforming the Christian education ministry of your church?

For reflection or discussion

1. In what ways does the vision of your church need some further “fleshing out”?
2. Do you think all the ministries of your church are in sync with your church’s vision? Are the leaders of those ministries trained and equip to lead according to that vision?
3. For many churches, their vision is something like to perpetuate the status quo indefinitely into the future. Why must this *not* be the vision we settle for in our churches?
4. Comenius insisted that every member of the Christian community has something to contribute to the edification of the whole body. Do you agree? Why or why not? How should the various ministries of the church work to accomplish that objective?
5. If you were to begin working to improve your church’s vision across the board, what would be the next steps?

Prayer:

Week 4, Day 1

When Revival is Needed

“So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked...”
Revelation 3.16, 17

Ministers of Scotland: Lectures on Revival

The Rev. John Bonar, Minister of Larbert and Dunipace

“So long as the Church is weighed down by a body of sin – so long as there is in all her members a law in the flesh which warreth against the law of the mind – so long as without ceasing there arises from her the voice of distress, ‘Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death!’ the enlightening, convincing, and converting influences of the Spirit will be required at each step of her process through the wilderness. And so long as the world remains a valley of the shadow of death, every where times of revival will be required – every where needed – every where to be sought.”

There is never a time in which churches are not candidates for revival, for our experience of the life of faith is never as rich or full as it could be, and our churches are never as vibrant and missional as they should be. So we must always be seeking the Lord for revival and not allow complacency to settle into our lives or ministries. Pastors and shepherds must stir their people with extraordinary visions of what God can do, and then they must lead them into extraordinary labors of prayer, pleading with God to do what He can.

What are some indications that your church might be ready for you to lead more aggressively in seeking the Lord for revival?

Week 4, Day 2

Aiming Too Low?

*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That the mountain of the LORD's house
Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
And shall be exalted above the hills;
And all nations shall flow to it. Isaiah 2.2*

Ministers of Scotland: Lectures on Revival

The Rev. John Bonar, Minister of Larbert and Dunipace

“...such a revival of true religion meets the darkness and deadness which comes over the Church in times of decay. In such times the designs, desires, and doings of the Church are apt to become to a lamentable extent low set. Contented with things as they are, she stretches not forward to the things that are before. The Spirit seems gone; and even the things which remain are ready to die.”

Most of our churches are not those envisioned by the prophet Isaiah (this must have been an important message because, as we've seen, Micah preached it, too). People are not flowing up to us, hungry to be taught the Word of God. We are not sending God's people out into the world to live and proclaim His Law, so that their neighbors come to faith and begin seeking the Lord. For many churches the vision they pursue is that of perpetuating the status quo indefinitely into the future. But if we want God to come and revive us and stretch us beyond where we've ever been before, we must dare to think it possible, and then be bold to ask (Eph. 3.20).

What kind of vision are you and your church leaders casting for your church? High-raised mountain or status quo? Reaching people or waiting for them to come to you? Bringing the love of God to the community or spending it all on themselves?

Week 4, Day 3

Content with Vague Hopes?

“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.” Revelation 3.18

Ministers of Scotland: Lectures on Revival II

The Rev. Jonathan R. Anderson, Minister of Kirkfield Parish, Glasgow

“In a dead state of the church, men are content with vague hopes of forgiveness; and affect to wonder at the presumption of those who speak of their being reconciled to God by the death of his Son. But when religion is revived, and the work of Christ applied; then the soul is so burdened with a sense of guilt, so oppressed with the fears of wrath, and so distressed with a conviction of alienation from God, that nothing will do but immediate and full restoration to the favour of God, and good hope of eternal life. Nor until this is obtained is there any progress made in real religion.”

“...content with vague hopes...” That phrase describes many believers today. Where they should have great vision, they have only vague hopes. They believe in Jesus and hope they’re going to go to heaven when they die, but they’re not sure either what that means, exactly, or what it requires of them here and now. They are believers, we must suppose, but they are living in dead churches, desperately in need of revival in the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. And where are the pastors and shepherds holding out more vivid and compelling visions of what God has promised and what He can do in and through us?

Do you and your church leaders hold out a vision of revival for your congregation? Are you teaching them to hunger for ongoing revival, or to be content with a kind of “status quo” faith in Christ?

Week 4, Day 4

The Might of God

*“The poor and needy seek water, and there is none,
Their tongues fail for thirst.
I, I the LORD will hear them;
I, I the God of Israel, will not forsake them. Isaiah 41.17*

Ministers of Scotland: Lectures on Revival VI

The Rev. Alexander Cumming, Minister of Dunbarney Parish

“Men under impression that there is no water, that is, feeling the comparative destitution of living water, will pray with an earnestness, painted by the tongue failing for thirst, and then a prodigal supply of living water will be granted to enrich and irrigate parched spots. And why will the God of Israel postpone the descent of the living water till this perception of moral desolation prompts such intense prayer? “that men may see and know and consider and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.” That is, that the moral transformation wrought on multitudes of mankind may be ascribed not to the eloquence or wisdom of man, but to the might of God’s outstretched arm.”

I suspect that most Christians today are fairly satisfied with the state of their faith. They have a “good enough” experience of Jesus and they’re not really thirsting for much more. But the job of pastors is to help people realize that splashing around in the mud puddle of faith is nothing compared with sailing on the ocean of God’s grace and power (Lewis). We must whet the appetites of our people for a greater experience of the Lord’s reviving power. When we do, they will begin to seek it more fervently.

Would you say that your preaching, teaching, and other ministries hold out a vision of “exceeding abundantly more” for your people and your church?

Week 4, Day 5

Seeking the Lost

“...for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” Luke 19:10

Ministers of Scotland: Lectures on Revival X

The Rev. Charles J. Brown, Minister of New North Kirk Parish, Edinburgh

“The next fruit of revival which I mention – namely, *zeal for the conversion of others, and especially of relatives and domestics*... Ah! In dead churches it is deemed the business of ministers to ‘pluck men as brands from the burning.’ Private members will rather leave them there to perish than put their hands to the work. It is not their business, forsooth!... of nothing, my friends, am I more firmly convinced than this, that that silence about God and divine things, which in dead churches is deemed the result of prudent and sober discretion, is in the vast majority of cases, the result of nothing but an unworthy shame, a mean worldly policy, a base fear of man bringing a snare; and, worst of all, a cold and heartless indifference and apathy and unbelief.”

Ouch! Many have remarked that our generation of “evangelicals” has left off the work of “evangelism.” We are not seeking the lost to save them, but we set up our churches to make them appealing to any who may be seeking so that they can seek their way into our midst and perhaps hear something of interest – if not *saving* interest, at least *enough* interest to keep them coming back for more. This “come/see” model does not in the least resemble the “go/tell” model which we find in the New Testament. When our churches begin to be revived the people in them will be clamoring for help in learning to lead their neighbors to the Lord.

Do you cast a vision for evangelism in your church? Do you provide training in evangelism? Do your people see your church as a “go/tell” or a “come/see” community?

Week 4, Day 6

The Need for Strong Heads

The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.
Philippians 4:9

On the Priesthood

John Chrysostom (ca. 344-407)

“For tell me, whence do you think such great troubles are generated in the Churches? I, for my part, believe the only source of them to be the inconsiderate and random way in which prelates [pastors and shepherds] are chosen and appointed. For the head ought to be the strongest part, that it may be able to regulate and control the evil exhalations which arise from the rest of the body below; but when it happens to be weak in itself, and unable to repel those pestiferous attacks, it becomes feebler itself than it really is, and ruins the rest of the body as well.”

The health of a local church is a reflection of the health of its leaders. If our pastors and shepherds are not spiritual people, gifted with vision and devoted to following Christ at all costs; if they are not truly people of prayer and the Word, despising sin and loving righteousness, then how can they expect such of the people they serve? John Chrysostom seems to have known himself fairly well, and he did not believe he was ready to be elevated to the work of pastoral ministry. How well do we know the state of our own spiritual lives?

How do you assess your walk with the Lord? When do you know that adjustments are needed in your spiritual disciplines? Do you have a soul friend who walks with you?

Week 4, Day 7

Hoping for Things Invisible

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on things on earth. Colossians 3:1 2

On the Catechising of the Uninstructed

Augustine (354-430)

“And assuredly it ought to be pointed out to him, that the Lord Himself would neither thus have admonished him and urged him to become a Christian, and to be incorporated into the Church, nor have taught him by such signs or revelations, had it not been His will that, for his greater safety and security, he should enter upon a pathway already prepared in the Holy Scriptures, in which he should not seek after visible miracles, but learn the habit of hoping for things invisible, and in which also he should receive monitions not in sleep but in wakefulness.”

We don't preach or teach enough about the “invisible things” of our faith – Christ exalted and reigning, the promises of God, angels and how they help us, spiritual forces of wickedness in high places, the glorious throne room of the Lord. But Paul commands us to set our minds on such things, which will be difficult to do unless someone serves as a “tour guide” to show us around these parts and teach us how to access them. Having a clear vision and a firm connection to unseen things can make for a more fruitful Christian life. Augustine believed it; he even wrote a little tract on the subject (“Faith of Things Not Seen”). Perhaps we should make this unseen realm more a part of our own instruction in the things of the Lord?

In what ways to the unseen things of our faith enter into your preaching and teaching?

For reflection or discussion

1. From the second century (Clement of Alexandria) to the twentieth century (Robert E. Coleman), we have seen the important role that vision plays in the life of faith. Suppose you were asked to give a presentation to fellow ministers on the role of vision. Below, briefly outline what you might say:
2. What is the alternative to nurturing clear, expansive, Biblical, and compelling vision for the people we serve?
3. In each of these areas – Christ exalted and the landscape of unseen things, the Kingdom of God, the Church, our salvation, and our callings and legacies – pastors and shepherds need to work hard to casting and sustaining Biblical vision. Why do you suppose we don't do this more effectively?
4. What's the most important lesson you've learned from these meditations
5. How are you planning to incorporate that in your walk with and work for the Lord?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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Thank you.