

A person is seen from behind, standing on a wooden boardwalk that splits into two paths leading to a vast green landscape under a bright sky. The person is wearing a light-colored shirt and dark pants. The boardwalk is made of wooden planks and is set against a lush green background. The sky is bright and hazy, suggesting a clear day. The overall scene is peaceful and evokes a sense of choice and direction.

VISIONEERING

GOD'S BLUEPRINT FOR DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING VISION

ANDY STANLEY

“Andy is a gifted, insightful communicator who has written a critically important book. The great challenge in life is crafting a meaningful and motivating personal vision for our time on earth. To that end, *Visioneering* is a MUST read.”

JOEL MANBY
PRESIDENT & CEO, SAAB CARS USA

“*Visioneering* is the best book on vision I’ve seen. It will put you on track toward discovering God’s purpose for your life. In my course, “The Vision of the Leader,” I quote from Andy’s book more than any other. *Visioneering* should be on the bookshelf of every pastor, business leader, and parent in America today. I heartily endorse it!”

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“Helen Keller said the only thing worse than having no sight is to have sight but no vision. Andy Stanley challenges us to look beyond just physically seeing things as they are and, instead, seeing things as God wants us to see—from His perspective.”

BOB RECCORD
NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD

“When Andy writes about visioneering, it is not theoretical exercise. It is biblical. It is practical. It is real. North Point Community Church is a thriving, vibrant community of faith because Andy practices what he preaches as a God-called man of vision.”

BRYANT WRIGHT
SENIOR PASTOR, JOHNSON FERRY BAPTIST CHURCH

“Anyone who knows my good friend Andy well, knows that he lives daily what he so masterfully writes about regarding ‘visioneering.’ Reading this book will be like getting a new prescription for your outdated glasses, allowing you to see with greater clarity the God-given vision for your future.”

RANDY POPE
PERIMETER CHURCH, DULUTH, GEORGIA

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Authors are somewhat like NASCAR drivers. They drive alone. But they don't race alone. Racing is a team sport. Although I wrote alone, I certainly did not produce this manuscript alone.

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VISIONEERING

ANDY STANLEY



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*This book is lovingly dedicated to my dad, Charles Stanley,
on whose shoulders I have been privileged to stand.
It was from that vantage point that I caught a glimpse
of what could be and should be for my life.*

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INTRODUCTION

Visioneering. A new word. An old concept. A familiar process. Where definitions fall short, a story often achieves clarity. So let's begin with a story.

On December 17, 1903, at 10:35 A.M., Orville Wright secured his place in history by executing the first powered and sustained flight from level ground. For twelve gravity-defying seconds he flew 120 feet along the dunes of the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

In the field of aviation, this historic event represents a beginning. But for Orville and Wilbur Wright, it was the end of a long and tedious journey. A journey initiated by a dream common to every little boy. The desire to fly. But what most children abandon to the domain of fantasy, Orville and Wilbur Wright seized upon as potential reality. They believed they could fly. More than that, they believed they should fly.

Wilbur described the birth of their vision this way.

Our personal interest in it [aviation] dates from our childhood days. Late in the autumn of 1878, our father came into the house one evening with some object partly concealed in his hands, and before we could see what it was, he tossed it into the air.

Instead of falling to the floor, as we expected, it flew across the room till it struck the ceiling, where it fluttered awhile, and finally sank to the floor. It was a little toy, known to scientists as a "hélicoptère," but which we, with sublime disregard for science, at once dubbed a "bat."

It was a light frame of cork and bamboo, covered with paper, which formed two screws, driven in opposite directions by rubber bands under torsion. A toy so delicate lasted only a short time in the hands of small boys, but its memory was abiding.¹

This childhood experience sparked in the boys an insatiable desire to fly. The only thing they lacked was a means. So they immediately went to work removing the obstacles that stood between them and their dream.

They began building their own hélicoptères. In doing so they stumbled upon the principles of physics that would pave the way to their first successful manned flight. In short, they began to engineer their vision. They took the necessary steps to ensure that what they believed could be, would be. This process captures the essence of visioneering.

Visioneering is the course one follows to make dreams a reality. It is the process whereby ideas and convictions take on substance. As the story of the Wright brothers illustrates, visioneering is the engineering of a vision. If I were to boil it down to a formula, it would look something like this:

$$\text{VISIONEERING} = \text{INSPIRATION} + \text{CONVICTION} + \\ \text{ACTION} + \text{DETERMINATION} + \text{COMPLETION}$$

DESTINATIONS

Life is a journey. And as you know, every journey has a destination. In the pages that follow we are going to spend some time discussing your destination. Not heaven and hell. Your destination in this life. Where you will end up in the various roles you play; what you will accomplish personally, professionally, domestically, and spiritually.

Everybody ends up somewhere in life. A few people end up somewhere on purpose. Those are the ones with vision. They may have other things going for them as well. But they certainly have vision. Not necessarily *a* vision (singular). Vision for each of the key roles they are assigned along the way.

Life is a multifaceted journey. It calls for a multifaceted vision.

Whether you are aware of it or not, you have multiple visions for your life. That is, you have a mental picture of what you want the various arenas of your life to look like down the road.

If I were to ask you to describe how you picture your life in ten years, chances are you could paint a fairly clear picture. No doubt you could outline a financial profile. You could describe what you hope to achieve relationally. You have some idea of where you want to be professionally. In other words, you would be able to look beyond what is and paint a picture of what could be—and in some cases what should be—true of your life. That's vision.

A *clear* vision, along with the courage to follow through, dramatically

increases your chances of coming to the end of your life, looking back with a deep abiding satisfaction, and thinking, *I did it. I succeeded. I finished well. My life counted.*

Without a clear vision, odds are you will come to the end of your life and wonder. Wonder what you could have done—what you should have done. And like so many, you may wonder if your life really mattered at all.

Vision gives significance to the otherwise meaningless details of our lives. And let's face it, much of what we do doesn't appear to matter much when evaluated apart from some larger context or purpose.

But take the minutia of this very day, drop it into the cauldron of a God-ordained vision, stir them around, and suddenly there is purpose! Meaning! Adrenaline!

It is the difference between filling bags with dirt and building a dike in order to save a town. There's nothing glamorous or fulfilling about filling bags with dirt. But saving a city is another thing altogether. Building a dike gives meaning to the chore of filling bags with dirt. And so it is with vision.

Too many times the routines of life begin to feel like shoveling dirt. But take those same routines, those same responsibilities, and view them through the lens of vision and everything looks different. Vision brings your world into focus. Vision brings order to chaos. A clear vision enables you to see everything differently.

Specifically, vision weaves four things into the fabric of our daily experience.

I. PASSION

Vision evokes emotion. There is no such thing as an emotionless vision. Think about your daydreams. The thing that makes daydreaming so enjoyable is the emotion that piggybacks on those mind's eye images. When we allow our thoughts to wander outside the walls of reality, our feelings are quick to follow.

A clear, focused vision actually allows us to experience ahead of time the emotions associated with our anticipated future. These emotions serve to reinforce our commitment to the vision. They provide a sneak preview of things to come. Even the most lifeless, meaningless task or

routine can begin to “feel” good when it is attached to a vision. Through the avenue of vision, the feelings reserved for tomorrow are channeled back into our present reality.

When I was in high school I never dated anybody who lived on my side of town. Our church was located in the middle of Atlanta. Consequently, we drew families from all around the city. Being the preacher’s son, my primary realm of influence (and acceptance) was church. So I dated church girls.

Unfortunately, none of the girls I was interested in lived near Tucker. They lived thirty or forty miles away. So I would put up with the traffic, the gas bills, and even leaving their houses early enough to be home by curfew. Why? It was worth it!

On Friday afternoon, the thought of being across town elicited in my teenage heart emotions that were strong enough to make the headache and expense of driving across town worth it. That’s vision. I was committed to what could be (being on the other side of Atlanta) as opposed to what was (sitting at home in Tucker).

Let’s face it, you did similar things as a teenager. Thoughts of what could and should be—and the emotions associated with those thoughts—drove you to all kinds of extremes. Some of which you probably regret. But think about how powerful, how compelling, those thoughts and feelings were. The emotions associated with being there (wherever *there* was) were enough to motivate you through the drudgery of getting there.

Vision is always accompanied by strong emotion. And the clearer the vision, the stronger the emotion.

2. MOTIVATION

Vision provides motivation. The mundane begins to matter. The details, chores, and routines of life become a worthwhile means to a planned-for end. Dike builders are a motivated bunch. Saving a town is enough to keep you working through the night. But just filling bags with dirt for the sake of bag-filling will leave you looking at your watch.

Vision-driven people are motivated people. Find me a man or woman who lacks motivation and I’ll show you someone with little or no vision. Ideas, yes. Dreams, maybe. Vision, not a chance.

Vision is a big part of the reason you completed college or graduate school. A lack of vision is the reason many never finish. Think of all the seemingly wasted hours of study and class time. Even then you knew that much of what you were memorizing for tests was a waste of time and effort. But you did it. Why? Because of what could be. A degree. And beyond a degree, a career. For four (or in my case, five!) long years you endured science labs, European history, research papers, and lectures. And you hung in there through it all—motivated by the thought of graduation and the rewards it would bring.

That is the power of vision.

3. DIRECTION

Maybe the most practical advantage of vision is it sets a direction for our lives. It serves as a road map. In this way, vision simplifies decision making. Anything that moves us toward the realization of our vision gets a green light. Everything else is approached with caution.

I have loved music all my life. God has blessed me with a measure of musical talent. I played in bands through high school and college. I have written a couple dozen songs. Like most serious musicians, I accumulated quite a collection of gear: recording equipment, guitars, keyboards, drum machines, and several miles of cable. Through the years it became an expensive and time-consuming hobby.

When Sandra and I were married, she allowed me the luxury of setting up a small studio in the basement of our condominium. In that environment time stood still. It was not unusual for me to retreat to my studio after dinner and emerge just in time for breakfast.

Four years after we were married, Andrew came along. Twenty months later, Garrett was born. As Andrew began to look less like a baby and more like a little boy, I started to give serious thought to my relationship with my children. I began focusing on what could be and what should be. Having spent ten years working with teenagers, I had a frighteningly clear picture of what could be and what should not be!

So, a few months before Garrett was born I made a decision. It was one of the easiest decisions I have ever made. But it came as a shock to those who knew my love for music. I decided to sell my studio gear. Why? I could see a storm brewing on the horizon. I knew I would be torn

between my family and the studio. Something had to go.

My vision for my family dictated that I put musical pursuits on hold. There was no way I would be able to develop the relationship I envisioned with my children while pursuing my musical aspirations.

Vision will prioritize your values. A clear vision has the power to bring what's most important to the surface of your schedule and lifestyle. A clear vision makes it easy to weed out of your life those things that stand in the way of achieving what matters most. Vision empowers you to move purposefully in a predetermined direction. Once you have clarified your vision, or visions, many decisions are already made. Without vision, good things will hinder you from achieving the best things.

My observation is that people without clear vision are easily distracted. They have a tendency to drift from one activity, pleasure, or relationship to another. Without vision, there is no relational, financial, or moral compass. Consequently, they often make foolish decisions. Decisions that rob them of their dreams.

4. PURPOSE

Vision translates into purpose. A vision gives you a reason to get up in the morning. If you don't show up, something important won't be accomplished. Suddenly, you matter. You matter a lot! Without you, what could be—what should be—won't be. A vision makes you an important link between current reality and the future. That dynamic gives your life purpose. And purpose carries with it the momentum to move you through the barriers that would otherwise slow you down and trip you up.

Your set of visions are unique to you. No one else will share your particular passions for what could be. Others may applaud them. They may buy into the aspects of your vision that interface with their life. And they may work with you in the areas where you share a common vision. But your vision-set is unique to you. This uniqueness gives your life purpose. You have a reason for getting up and showing up.

THE DIVINE ELEMENT

Granted, you have probably heard or read this type of stuff before. Self-help books are full of this kind of hype. We have all read something about

goal setting. If you believe—you can achieve! You know the drill.

But here is where we part ways with the secular motivational gurus of our culture. The average person has the right to dream his own dreams and develop his own picture of what his future could and should be. But at the cross, those of us who have sworn allegiance to the Savior lost that right. After all, we are not our own. We have been bought with a price. Remember the rest? We are to glorify—or honor—God with our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

Honoring God involves discovering his picture or vision of what our lives could and should be. Glorifying God involves discovering what we could and should accomplish. We were created and re-created with his purposes in mind. And until we discover his purpose—and follow through—there will always be a hole in our soul.

With that in mind, rethink the implications of this familiar verse:

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)

Don't let this slip by. You are his workmanship. Say it out loud, "I am God's workmanship." Do you know what that means? It means you are the product of God's vision. God has decided what you could be and should be. You are the outcome of something God envisioned. And through Christ he has brought about, and continues to bring about, changes in you in accordance with his picture of what you could and should be.

But his vision for you is not complete. You have a part. Look at the next phrase. We have been envisioned and then crafted for a particular purpose. And that purpose is to do good works which God has envisioned us doing.

God has a vision for your life. That is, he has a mental image of what you could and should be as well as what you could and should do. In my first book, *Like a Rock*, I focused on his vision of what you could and should become. In this book, we are going to focus on what he wants you to accomplish.

Honestly, I can't get over the fact that the God of the universe has

something in mind for us to do. After all, doesn't he have other things to think about? But the apostle Paul assures us that God has prepared something specific for us to do.

MORE TO THIS LIFE

All that to say, as Christians, we do not have a right to take our talents, abilities, experiences, opportunities, and education and run off in any direction we please. We lost that right at Calvary. But then, why would we dream of such a thing? God has a vision for your life. What could possibly be more fulfilling than that?

At the same time, we have no right to live visionless lives either. If God—think about it—if God has a vision for what you are to do with your allotment of years, you had better get in on it. What a tragedy to miss it. Missing out on God's plan for our lives must be the greatest tragedy this side of eternity.

Granted, this world offers a truckload of options when it comes to possible visions to pursue. But you were tailor-made, carefully crafted, minutely detailed for a selected divine agenda. It is what you were created and re-created for. God's visions for your life are *the* things that will give your life impact beyond this life. For, as we will see, God's visions always have an eternal element. His individual vision for your life is a small part of a plan he envisioned and put in motion long before you or I came on the scene—but now I'm jumping ahead.

Without God's vision, you may find yourself in the all too common position of looking back on a life that was given to accumulating green pieces of paper with pictures of dead presidents on them. Granted, that is a vision. Maybe that has been your vision up until now. And you may have been vastly successful at the accumulation game.

But let's face it, at each milestone in your pursuit of more stuff, you feel like you did as a kid after all the presents were opened on Christmas morning. *Is that all there is?* Chances are, the memories of your successes elicit little or no passion. They are just memories. After all, a closing is a closing. A sale is a sale. A deal is a deal.

Accumulating money or stuff is a vision of sorts. But it is the kind of vision that leaves men and women wondering. Wondering if there was more. Wondering what they could have done—should have done—with

their brief stay on this little ball of dirt.

You cannot wring enough life or meaning out of secular accomplishment to satisfy your soul. The hole you are trying to fill has an eternal and spiritual dimension that only matters of eternity and spirituality can satisfy. This is why it is imperative that you discover and participate in God's multifaceted vision for your life. It is what you were made for. Your homespun visions—as challenging and demanding as they may be—fall short. They will always leave you wondering.

We serve an intensely creative God. We talk about the fact that no two snowflakes are alike—but God has never made two of anything alike. God's vision for you does not include pressing you into someone else's mold. He is not in the business of conforming us to the image of other Christians. Your uniqueness and individuality will reach its pinnacle in the context of your pursuit of God's plan for your life. Manmade visions all begin to look alike after a while. Unless you discover God's unique vision for your future, your life may very well be a rerun.

Having said all that, let's begin. Our study will center around the life and vision of Nehemiah. Several things make his story particularly relevant to our modern day situation. The one I find most encouraging is that there are no overt miracles associated with his story. This is a tale of hard work, prayer, and (behind the scenes) divine intervention. Nothing out of the ordinary here.

Let's face it, if we could heal at will, part the Red Sea with the flick of a wrist, or walk on water, it would make the process of accomplishing our goals much simpler. We are tempted to look with suspicion at the Old and New Testament heroes who had a supernatural ace up their sleeves.

But not Nehemiah. He was just a regular guy who caught a divine glimpse of what could and should be. And then went after it with all his heart.

BUILDING BLOCKS

1. A vision begins as a concern.
2. A vision does not necessarily require immediate action.
3. Pray for opportunities and plan as if you expect God to answer your prayers.
4. God is using your circumstances to position and prepare you to accomplish his vision for your life.
5. What God originates, he orchestrates.
6. Walk before you talk; investigate before you initiate.
7. Communicate your vision as a solution to a problem that must be addressed immediately.
8. Cast your vision to the appropriate people at the appropriate time.
9. Don't expect others to take greater risks or make greater sacrifices than you have.
10. Don't confuse your plans with God's vision.
11. Visions are refined—they don't change; plans are revised—they rarely stay the same.
12. Respond to criticism with prayer, remembrance, and if necessary, a revision of the plan.
13. Visions thrive in an environment of unity; they die in an environment of division.
14. Abandon the vision before you abandon your moral authority.
15. Don't get distracted.
16. There is divine potential in all you envision to do.
17. The end of a God-ordained vision is God.
18. Maintaining a vision requires adherence to a set of core beliefs and behaviors.
19. Visions require constant attention.
20. Maintaining a vision requires bold leadership.

A VISION IS BORN

The soul never thinks without a picture.

ARISTOTLE

What is a vision?
Where do they come from?

Visions are born in the soul of a man or woman who is consumed with the tension between what is and what could be. Anyone who is emotionally involved—frustrated, brokenhearted, maybe even angry—about the way things are in light of the way they believe things could be, is a candidate for a vision. Visions form in the hearts of those who are dissatisfied with the status quo.

Vision often begins with the inability to accept things the way they are. Over time that dissatisfaction matures into a clear picture of what *could be*. But a vision is more than that. After all, what *could be* is an idea, a dream, but not necessarily a vision.

There is always a moral element to vision. Vision carries with it a sense of conviction. Anyone with a vision will tell you this is not merely something that *could* be done. This is something that *should* be done. This is something that must happen. It is this element that catapults men and women out of the realm of passive concern and into action. It is the moral element that gives a vision a sense of urgency.

Vision is a clear mental picture of what could be, fueled by the conviction that it should be.

Vision is a preferred future. A destination. Vision always stands in contrast to the world as it is. Vision demands change. It implies movement. But a vision requires someone to champion the cause.

For a vision to become a reality, someone must put his or her neck on the line. Vision requires visionaries, people who have allowed their minds and hearts to wander outside the artificial boundaries imposed by the world as it is. A vision requires an individual who has the courage to act on an idea.

And that brings us to our story.

ONCE UPON A TIME...

Around 587 B.C., the Babylonians invaded Judah and destroyed the city of Jerusalem, along with Solomon's temple. This was the third of three campaigns into that region. On all three occasions the Babylonians took a number of Israelites as captives and resettled them in Babylon. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were taken during the first invasion.

About seventy years after the first Babylonian invasion, Cyrus, king of Persia (who had since conquered the Babylonians), gave the Jews permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

Under the leadership of a man named Zerubbabel, these exiled Jews returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple. Things were looking up for a while. It seemed as if Israel was on the verge of becoming a blessed nation once again. But the people refused to turn away from the very sins God had judged their ancestors for in the days of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar.

The temple was not being maintained. Sacrifices had ceased. The Jews continued to adopt the religious practices and culture of the surrounding nations. By the time our story begins, the political, social, and spiritual conditions in Jerusalem were deplorable.

Meanwhile, back in Persia, a Jewish fellow named Nehemiah heard about the plight of his homeland—and he felt something. In fact, what he felt, he felt so deeply that he wept. And as we will see later, Nehemiah was not the sort of man who wept at the drop of a hat. He wasn't weak. And he certainly wasn't emotionally unstable. But he was burdened. And his burden

drove him to a prolonged period of prayer and fasting (Nehemiah 1:4).

Little did he know these deep feelings were the initial birth pains of a vision that people would be reading about thousands of years later. The point is, Nehemiah's vision didn't begin as a vision. It began as a concern, a burden. A burden for his nation and its people.

BUILDING BLOCK #1

A VISION BEGINS AS A CONCERN.

A God-ordained vision will begin as a concern. You will hear or see something that gets your attention. A thought related to the future will generate an emotion. Something will bother you about the way things are or the way things are headed. Unlike many passing concerns, these will stick with you. You will find yourself thinking about them in your free time. You may lose sleep over them. You won't be able to let them go because they won't let you go.

Nehemiah's concern over the condition of Jerusalem consumed him. It broke his heart. Thoughts of what *was* as opposed to what *could be* brought tears to his eyes. It changed his countenance. Everyone who knew him was aware that something was bothering Nehemiah. This was not a casual concern. This was a vision in the making.

So what did he do? Nothing. He *did* absolutely nothing. He didn't steal away across the desert in the night. He didn't fabricate a reason to leave Persia. He didn't even share his burden with other concerned Jews.

But neither did he allow his daily responsibilities to distract him from the burden that had gripped his heart. No, Nehemiah chose the third and most difficult option. He chose to wait. Nehemiah knew what so many of us have a hard time remembering: What could be and should be can't be until God is ready for it to be. So he waited.

BUILDING BLOCK #2

A VISION DOES NOT NECESSARILY REQUIRE IMMEDIATE ACTION.

I talk to a lot of people with a lot of good ideas. In many instances I sense God is in the process of birthing a vision in their hearts. In almost every case, they are ready to start NOW! Once they feel their idea is from God, they assume all systems are go and they need to quit their jobs, step out on faith, and begin. But the story of Nehemiah, along with numerous

other biblical accounts, illustrates the truth that a clear vision does not necessarily indicate a green light to begin. In fact, I have witnessed a good many people with what seemed to be God-ordained visions charge out of the starting gates too early. And the result is always the same. Failure. Discouragement. Disillusionment.

A vision rarely requires immediate action. It always requires patience.

WHY WAIT?

Why is this the case? Why can't we just plunge ahead?

Developing or discovering a vision for a particular area of our lives takes time. Visioneering is a process. Sometimes it is a painful process. Because of the time required, it can be agonizing. But it is a process that yields a product worth every bit of the agony along the way.

Revvng our vision engines at the starting line feels like a waste of time. After all, there are things to be done. People to rescue. Organizations to begin. What is the use of waiting?

This sense of "time is awasting" is the very thing that compels people to move out too soon. The assumption is, since we aren't moving on, nothing's going on. But that is not the case at all. Three important things are taking place while we wait.

1. THE VISION MATURES IN US.

Not every good idea is vision material. But every vision begins as an idea. Not all burdens are vision material. But every vision begins as a burden. Time allows us to distinguish between good ideas and visions worth throwing the weight of our life behind. Waiting gives us a chance to examine our emotions and sort our minor concerns from major ones. After all, if what concerned you yesterday is of little concern today, odds are that was not vision material. I will give you several tips on distinguishing good ideas from God ideas at the end of this chapter.

Just as you cannot rush the development of a child in the womb, so we cannot rush the development of a vision. God determines the schedule for both. Acting too quickly on a vision is like delivering a baby prematurely. They are always weak. And in some cases a preemie cannot survive the rigors of life outside the womb. So it is with a vision. Immature visions are weak. They rarely make it in the real world.

The world is hard on a vision. After all, a vision is about change. And change is not welcomed in most arenas of life. For a vision to survive, it must be mature and healthy before being exposed to the cynical, critical, stubborn environment in which it is expected to survive. And maturity requires time.

As a college student, I had two friends who felt called to career missions. Chip felt the call during a missions conference in our church. For David, it was a sequence of events that tipped him off as to God's call on his life.

Knowing these guys as well as I did, I'm sure that if they had had the opportunity to sign up and ship out on the day they sensed God's call on their lives, they would have both headed for the airport. Fortunately, the system didn't work that way.

During the process of finishing college, Chip slowly began to lose interest. After college he got married and took a job in another city. His explanation? "I thought that was what God was calling me to do at the time. I realize now I am to be a missionary in the corporate world." Of course, that just sounded like a good excuse at the time. But Chip has followed through with that vision. He is very active in his local church and is effective in the ministry of lifestyle evangelism.

David, on the other hand, went to the Philippines and planted a church. As I write, he and his wife Kathy have just begun their second church plant in that area of the world.

Let's face it, a good motivational speaker can cast such a compelling vision that before you know it you feel like it is your own. And in some cases, it may become your own. Time will tell. With time, you will be able to distinguish between God's ideas for you and other people's ideas. As we wait, God will shape and mature ideas into visions that can survive in the real world.

2. WE MATURE IN PREPARATION FOR THE VISION.

Not only does our vision mature, we mature as well. Often, we are not ready to move out in pursuit of a vision. The tendency is to assume that since I know what I am to do, I'm ready to do it. But the two don't always coincide. God has to grow us into our vision. Like a child trying on her mommy's wedding dress, it doesn't fit—yet. But in time, after some growing up,

it will look like it was made for her.

If you saw *The Empire Strikes Back*, you remember the scene in which Luke wants to go rescue his friends before he has finished his Jedi Knight training. Yoda begs him to wait. “Luke, you must complete the training.”

But Luke has seen the future, and he knows his friends’ lives are in danger. “I can’t keep the vision out of my head. They are my friends; I must help them.”

Yoda finally issues a dire warning, “If you leave now, help them you could, but you will destroy all for which they have fought and suffered.”

But Luke is determined to go. He is so locked in on what could and should be that he feels compelled to leave immediately. So he does. And do you remember what happened? Everything worked out great!

But back in this galaxy, action before preparation usually spells disaster.

In the case of a divinely ordered vision God goes to work in you to prepare you for what he knows lies ahead. Like Luke, the need often seems so urgent it seems foolish to wait. But God is sovereign. Keep that in mind. Your vision is simply an extension of his vision. And his timing is perfect. The apostle Paul said it this way:

For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13)

He is working in you to prepare you to act on his purposes. And I think we can assume his purposes are in accordance with his timetable. Maybe that’s why he inspired the apostle to write the next phrase: “Do all things without grumbling or disputing” (v. 14).

I assume *all things* includes waiting on him. Don’t you hate that? The complaint most associated with the process of visioneering is God’s timing. Once the vision is clear we assume we are ready. Otherwise, why would he have given us the vision in the first place?

My guess is that without a vision, our willingness to allow God to prepare us would be greatly diminished. Who would suffer the headache of college or graduate school without the vision of job opportunities? Your vision will enable you to endure the preparation. Vision always precedes

preparation. Initially, your vision will exceed your competency. Within the context of that tension, God will go to work on you.

Good Idea/Bad Timing

Remember Moses? Poor guy. He had the right idea, but his timing and methods were terrible. His vision was to free his people from Egyptian slavery. And that was a God-thing if there ever was one. So what did Moses do? He went to work. He killed an Egyptian.

Now I don't know if he actually sat down and calculated how long it would take to deliver Israel by killing one Egyptian at a time. But at best, it would have taken several lifetimes.

So what did God do? He sent him to the University of Sinai. This was not a four-year study program. He was a freshman for ten years. His sophomore, junior, and senior experiences were equally as long. And there were no spring breaks.

It took Moses forty years to grow into the vision God had designed for him. Forty years! Meanwhile, back in Egypt, another generation or two dies at the hands of Egyptian taskmasters. What was God thinking? Didn't he know the urgency of the matter? Israel didn't have forty years to wait. Why give a man a vision and then send him to the desert?

We could spend pages speculating as to why God does the things he does. Suffice it to say, that is the way he works. He did the same thing with the apostle Paul. He told him specifically that he would be used to reach the Gentiles (Acts 9:15–16). And then he sent Paul to the desert as well (Galatians 1:17–18).

So what's the deal with the desert? I don't know. But I do know the time between catching a glimpse of what God wants to do through us and the time when we are led to move out often feels like a desert experience. The desert always feels like a complete waste of time. It is only when we are able to look back that our desert experiences make sense.

Our Hero

Nehemiah, on the other hand, got off pretty easy by comparison. By his account, he only had to wait four months before the wheels started turning. But he had to wait nonetheless. As the story unfolds, it becomes evident his service to the king of Persia was in fact his desert experience. For

this was a man with immense leadership ability who awoke every day to do a job that tapped little or none of those skills.

Can you relate? Do you wake up every day to circumstances that have absolutely nothing remotely to do with the vision you sense God is developing in you? Then you are in good company. Joseph reviewed his vision from an Egyptian dungeon. Moses spent years following sheep. David, the teenage king, spent years hiding in caves. And Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the very king whose ancestors had destroyed the city he longed to rebuild! Be encouraged. God has you there for a reason.

I don't know your situation. But from what I read in the Scriptures, I would guess the time required for God to grow you into his vision for your life will be somewhere between four months and forty years. And if you feel you are on the forty-year track, here's one other bit of information you might want to chew on. There seems to be a correlation between the preparation time and the magnitude of the task to which we are called. Leading God's people out of four hundred years of slavery required more than a four-year degree. It required forty years of preparation. But then again, we are still talking about it today.

3. GOD IS AT WORK BEHIND THE SCENES PREPARING THE WAY.

There is a third important process taking place between the birth of a vision and our pursuit of it. In the case of a divinely ordered vision, God is working behind the scenes to prepare the way. This is why it is so important that we wait on his timing. Remember, your personal vision is only one small piece of the puzzle.

Ultimately, we are taking part in a massive assault that began one dark afternoon on a hill just outside of Jerusalem. God's vision for your life is much bigger than you. Apart from his intervention and preparation, you and I are incapable of pulling off even our small part of the operation. We dare not move ahead too early.

Nehemiah certainly knew how this worked. And he knew that apart from divine intervention there was no way in the world he would be able to take part in the reconstruction of Jerusalem. So he bided his time and prayed. Oh yeah, and he did one other thing. He thought about it a lot. He dreamed about it. In fact, as we will see in the next chapter, he went so far as to think through exactly what it would take to pull off a project

of that magnitude. And unbeknownst to him, God was working behind the scenes the whole time.

AUTHENTICATING YOUR VISION

One of the most difficult aspects of visioneering is distinguishing between good ideas and God ideas. We all have good ideas. Everybody is concerned or burdened about something. But how do you know which ideas to act on? Certainly Nehemiah was not the only Jew whose heart was broken over the condition of Jerusalem. How did he know *he* was the one to do something about it?

As a pastor I have counseled with dozens of men and women who were in the process of determining the source of a concern or burden they carried. I have watched many of these successfully launch and maintain what appear to be visions forged in heaven. While developing the material for this book I interviewed several Christian men and women who have visioneered ideas into successful enterprises. You will be introduced to several of these in the course of our time together.

These encounters have led me to conclude two things concerning the distinction between good ideas and God ideas:

1. A GOD-ORDAINED VISION WILL EVENTUALLY FEEL LIKE A MORAL IMPERATIVE.

If it is God who has begun painting a picture of what could and should be on the canvas of your heart, over time you will begin to sense that not to follow through would be tantamount to an act of disobedience. Your vision will begin to feel like a moral imperative. As the burden in you grows, you will feel compelled to take action.

This is why waiting is so important. Time allows your heavenly Father to transition what begins as an idea into a moral compulsion. The vision simply will not go away. Your only alternative to following through will be to say, “No. No, I’m not going to move in that direction. I’m not going to pick up this burden and act on it.”

2. A GOD-ORDAINED VISION WILL BE IN LINE WITH WHAT GOD IS UP TO IN THE WORLD.

A second indicator is that there will always be alignment between a

divinely originated vision and God's master plan for this age. There will always be a correlation between what God has put in an individual's heart to do and what he is up to in the world at large.

As we said at the outset, at Calvary we lost our right to devise our own plans and pursue our own agendas. Like a good father, our heavenly Father has a vision for each of his children, a vision that lends support to his work in this world.

All divinely inspired visions are in some way tied into God's master plan. Whether it is loving your wife, investing in your kids, witnessing to your neighbor, launching a ministry, or starting a company, every divinely placed burden has a link to a bigger picture. As a believer, there is a larger, more encompassing context for everything you do.

It was Israel's strategic role in God's plan that made Nehemiah's vision so compelling. As we will see, it wasn't the condition of the walls that broke his heart. It was the spiritual condition of his people.

If the idea or burden you are mulling over is from God, there will be an overt connection between it and God's providential will. It will become apparent how the thing you feel compelled to do connects with what God is up to in this generation.

Initially, you may not see a connection. If not, wait.

YOUR PART

There are several productive things you can do while you wait. To begin with, investigate. In chapter 6 we will explore the importance of investigation in detail. In the meantime, ask some questions. Talk to people who have pursued similar visions. Read. Observe. Learn everything you can.

Investigation will accomplish one of three things. It will: confirm the divine origin of your vision, give further definition and focus to the vision, or tip you off that you were mistaken about the vision altogether.

In chapter 2 we will discover what Nehemiah did while he waited. Remember, with a vision, timing is critical. Waiting does not reflect a lack of faith. Usually it is evidence of wisdom.

VISIONEERING

PROJECT #1

1. You have multiple visions for your life. Some are clearer than others. To begin clarifying what you believe your future should hold, write a one-sentence summary of how you believe life ought to be in the following areas. In other words, describe your preferred future.
 - Career
 - Finances
 - Spouse
 - Children
 - Ministry
 - _____
2. Visions are often born in the soul of a man or woman who is gripped by a tension between what is and what should be. Are you gripped by a particular tension? If so, take a minute to describe your dilemma.
 - What's bothering you?
 - What is the solution?
 - What should be?
3. Have any of your burdens begun to feel like a moral imperative?
4. Do you see a connection between your various visions and what God is up to in this world? Describe the connection. How does your picture of a preferred future support God's providential will?

