

MIRACLE...TO GIVE ME VISION FOR LIFE
Hebrews 12:1-3

It Would Take A Miracle Series
March 18, 2012
Pastor Nathan J. Thompson

Both of the summers after my 8th and 9th grade years I spent around 10-days each July helping some family friends on their farm near Morris, MN. This couple had two small children at that time and I went to help the father with some of his farming and small grain harvesting chores.

During my stay each summer I would drive the old farm truck, along with the tractor and a couple big wagons, next to the combine driven by the farmer and he would unload the newly harvested wheat, or oats, or barley, into these moving containers.

I would then go back to a grainery on the farm and unload, and then back to the field to repeat the process. At my young junior high age I found these 10-days to be hard work but also kind of exciting—especially being able to drive an old truck and tractors with a clutch.

I remember one day when the moisture content of the grain was too high to harvest. The farmer took me to a field where he told me he was going to teach me how to plow the field. He showed me where to place the tractor tires and how to use the hydraulic lift to regulate the depth of the plow. It was a smaller four bottom plow he was training me on.

And then he told me one of the most important words of advice. He said make sure you line the tractor up with a fencepost on the other side of the field. Keep your eyes and front of the tractor focused on this goal and you'll go straight. If you don't, then you'll swerve back and forth.

He went around with me a couple of times to see if I got the hang of it and then left me to fare for myself. One problem I had was that since it was a very hot and sunny day I took my shirt off to get a tan. After some time, however, when I looked for my shirt, I realized that it had fallen off the tractor and I had plowed it under. Needless to say, I was very sunburned that day.

And yet this experience helped me learn an important truth—it is important to set your eyes, to set your life, on a vision, a goal. This truth is that if you keep focused on this vision and goal that your life will take a straighter path rather than going all different directions.

The Bible, of course, is very clear that you and I need a vision, a focus, for our lives. Hebrews 12:1-3 says, *“And let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”* Jesus is to be our vision and goal.

And in the Old Testament, Proverbs 29:18, it says, *“Without vision the people perish.”* The truth is that if you don't know where your life is going; if you don't have any guiding goals and direction, that you will surely flounder. God wants to give each person the miracle of vision for their existence.

There is an old Peanuts cartoon that pictured Charlie Brown and Lucy on a cruise ship. Lucy the aspiring philosopher is saying, “Charlie Brown, people are often like being on a cruise ship. Some people place their deck chairs facing the front so they can see where they are going.”

“Some other people place their chairs facing the side where they can appreciate the view. And then there are some who place their deck chairs looking back so they can see where they have been. Where do you place your deck chair, Charlie Brown?” And Charlie says, “I can’t even get my deck chair unfolded.”

Now as humorous as that is, it is oftentimes way too true. Many people can’t get their deck chairs unfolded. Many do not have any real direction or focus for their lives. Many people simply live for today not really thinking about what they want their life to mean or become.

A favorite illustration I have shared before comes from Stephen Covey’s book, *“Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.”* In one of his chapters, Covey asks us to imagine that we are going to our own memorial or funeral service.

In this memorial service Covey asks us to imagine that four people are giving tributes to us about our lives—our spouse, one of our children, a coworker, and our best friend. And then he asks us to think about, and contemplate, what we would like these people to say about us?

Would we want our spouse to say that we were loving, faithful, a good listener, and always put them first? Would we want one of our children to tell how we always took time for them, how we were a good role model and example for them, how we showed them good morals?

Would we want a coworker to talk about how we always treated each person at work fairly, how we showed integrity in our decisions, and how we worked well as a team member? Would we want our best friend to say what a great friend we were, how we were always there to support them, how we were someone they could always trust to do what we said?

Stephen Covey then makes the point that if this is what we want to be known for at the end of our lives that then we need to work back to today. With the kind of character and example we want to be known for we need to set a plan right now for what we need to start doing today in order to reach that goal.

And the same thing is true with keeping our eyes on Jesus and allowing him to perfect and strengthen our faith. To be that loving, and caring, and honest person needs to start right now, not at the end of our lives. Living for Jesus takes following our vision and goals right now.

When I was growing up in the 60’s the Beatles’ songwriter, John Lenin, came out with a song, “Imagine.” He beckoned us to imagine a world where everyone would live in peace. And today we often see on cars a bumper sticker that says, “Visualize Peace.” The thinking is that if we will simply visualize these things that they will happen.

The writer of Hebrews beckons us to keep our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. He tells us to stay focused on Jesus, to keep him at the center of the vision for our lives.

With our eyes, and faith, and life centered on Jesus we truly know where we are going, and we will become more like him each day.

Stephen Covey also says in his book, and in subsequent books, that each person, and marriage, and family should write and define their own personal mission statements. Just like companies and churches, it is important for each person and marriage to define who they are, where they are going, and what kind of life they want to lead.

When Kim and I got married 36-years ago we agreed that our mission statement would be, “Lord, make us instruments,” from the Prayer of St. Francis. We used this theme in our wedding service, and vowed to be God’s instruments to each other, to our children who may come, and to whatever church or community God would call us to.

To have this mission statement and focus has helped us countless times in our lives. It constantly reminds us that God needs to be number one in us and in our marriage. It has reminded us that that the most important thing we can give our children is for them to know Jesus by faith and for them to see God’s vision for their lives.

This mission focus has reminded us time and again that serving, and giving, and helping others in Jesus’ name is always more fulfilling than our own selfish pleasures. And the many times we have failed or have wandered from God’s path this mission and vision has called us back.

It is interesting that a study a few years ago in “Success” magazine uncovered some surprising insights into the way Americans view success. In identifying the most important factors for success the respondents answered, “Good relationships with family—89.9%; Good relationship with spouse—89.6%; Good relationship with God—86.0%.

My friends, I am concerned today that so many people have worldly visions for themselves and their lives. So many focus on the vision that they want lots of money, or lots of travel and entertainment, or want their kids to be great athletes or musicians, or want to have that certain home, cabin, or winter spot. Not that there is anything wrong with any of these visions.

And yet all these earthly things can easily be empty and fleeting. Ah, but to have your vision on Jesus, on growing in your faith, on living for Jesus, on serving him, changes your whole purpose for living. It means that you seek first God’s kingdom—that you worship each week, get involved in learning and Bible study opportunities, give of your money and time serving others.

Oh, and it is important to note that you still may be successful, may be blessed financially, may be able to travel and share in the joys of cabins, or winter homes, or whatever. But with Jesus and his mission as your vision and goals, the way you use and rely on these other things will be different. For living your life for Jesus means you are blessed beyond imagination.

My friends, what is your mission and vision for life? Your marriage? Your family? May you listen to this advice from Hebrews, to “*run with perseverance the race that is set before (you), fixing your eyes on Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of (your) faith.*”