

“Flourish”: Creating a Culture of Transformation
A Vision of Transformation
Text: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

“When you were a child, what did you imagine that you would be doing at your present age? How different is your present experience from that vision?”

“Read Genesis 12:1-2. Do you think Abram had any idea of the impact that his ‘yes’ would have on humanity? Although we aren’t provided with all the details, what do you think ultimately prompted him to follow God’s plan and move?”

“How often do you think that Abram quietly contemplated the vision that God had formed for him? How often do you imagine that he called into question the likelihood of its fulfillment? How do you imagine that it sustained him in times of adversity? When he wasn’t experiencing anything that remotely resembled that vision?”

“Does your present vision for life require faith? It is within your reach, without God? How might you deploy your present level of faith in order to experience more grace?” (e.g. “As soon as their feet touch the water, the flow of water will be cut off upstream, and the river will stand up like a wall.” Joshua 3)

“Where are the places of ‘holy discontent’ in your life? Where are the places of passionate curiosity?”

“What do you need to stop dwelling on in order to move forward? What new thing do you sense that God is doing in you? Of what will you need to repent? What belief will you have to adopt as truth?”

“Who are you? How are you presently making yourself available to God? Where in your life are you currently experiencing healing or renewal? With whom might you share it?”

Teaching Notes...

Over the next several weeks, we will be talking about our vision as a church and how it accommodates the Kingdom vision of Jesus. We will consider our own personal responses and how we might collectively live out its implications in the places and amongst the people God desires to love through us.

I think it's fair to say that Jesus was preoccupied with the "Kingdom".

"...Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's Good News. 'The time promised by God has come at last!' he announced. 'The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!'" Mark 1:14b-15

Jesus came announcing and inaugurating the Kingdom: *God's will, God's desires done God's way, producing God's anticipated outcomes---* "restoration".

Jesus' intent was to offer a vision of God and his way of life that would not only convince us of Father's goodness and good intentions toward us but would challenge us to willingly re-orient ourselves in ways that nourish the new life made possible in and through him. It involved (2) lifestyle responses: "Repentance" and "faith" (belief).

Jesus sets before us contrasting approaches, contrasting visions of life, and offers us characteristics and consequences of either--- **"life" and "death", "light" or "darkness", "truth" or a "lie"---** then he vulnerably invites us to choose.

Jesus was a master teacher who understood that in order to compel us toward the Kingdom vision for our lives, he must tell us stories that get our attention, provoke our imaginations, capture our hearts, win our affections, and re-orient our lives.

Ivan Illich, Australian Philosopher, was once asked how true transformation comes to a culture/society. He made an interesting statement:

"Neither revolution nor reformation can ultimately change a society, rather you must tell a new powerful tale, one so persuasive that it sweeps away the old myths and becomes the preferred story, ... If you want to change a society, then you have to tell an alternative story."

Stories are powerful. Story always facilitates the meaning of our experience. Because of the Story, we are able to take our experiences and interpret in light of the Story. Because we are "meaning-seeking" creatures, we don't do well with experiences for which we are unable to find meaning.

Without a framing story, we get “stuck”. We’re left simply with our own uninterpreted experiences. It’s what we do in therapy. We trace the “*What?*” and the “*Why?*” and the “*Now what?*” Our default response is to make up a story into which we might fit all of the seemingly random and chaotic (“Everything happens for a reason!” “It was just fate, I guess”. Theological statements).

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.’” Matthew 16:24-25

To “*deny yourself*” is to admit the resources for the life for which we all long are not resident within us apart from God.

Vision is a state of the heart, not a statement. Vision is what we see with our hearts.

“I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him.” Ephesians 1:18-19

Our vision for life always orients our lifestyle and will always be proportionate to our sense of longing and desperation: the deeper our pain and frustration, the larger our vision of something different.. something better.

Paul here is calling to mind his first impressions of the believers in Thessalonica (Acts 16-17). Paul says this radical reversal was the result of (4) distinct expressions of a *gospel-reality*:

Their **identity**, in Christ.

“... God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people” (1:4).

An **encounter** of God, through the person of the Holy Spirit.

“... so you received the message, with joy, from the Holy Spirit...” (1:6).

A **testimony/witness** of the truth about Jesus that they were now replicating in their own community.

“... you have become an example...” (1:7) *“The word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere...”* (1:8)

The **new life** that they were experiencing as a result of their willingness to re-think their controlling-narrative, and the practical and identifiable impact their profession of belief had on their way of life.

“... they keep talking about how you turned away from idols to serve the living and true God...” (1:9) He summarizes them as “*faithful work, loving deeds, and enduring hope...*” (1:3)

“What is vision?”

- An image of a preferred future. It is the link between our present experience and our future hopes.
- Nourishes your passions, gives permission to your will, and frames a lifestyle.
- Gives meaning to all of the adversity we face and nurtures perseverance.
- Compelling enough for people to want to embrace the vision for themselves.

Woodinville Alliance Church... a community where every person discovers who they really are in Christ, experiences his goodness, and shares this life-changing encounter with their world so that others might value and choose Jesus for themselves.

This new life results in a movement from Self-reliance to God-reliance, Isolation to Belonging, Fear to Trust, Duty to Delight, Insignificance to Purpose, Brokenness to Wholeness. [These (6) movements are healthy indicators of our transformation]

The vision is not a “statement” but a trajectory for movement.

Identity: Our story never begins with us choosing God, but God choosing us. This is God’s way of eliminating any means of establishing our own value and worth and significance, apart from him.

“You didn’t choose me, but I chose you.” John 15:16

Encounter: God is eager to be known and experienced by all, so we seek to make ourselves intentionally “present to” (available to) and “present for” (available for) God.

Testimony: As the Kingdom come “*in you*” fosters healing, renewal, and restoration in your own life, relationships, and community, you will be eager to bear witness so that others might flourish.

New Life: Through the Holy Spirit in and with us, we become the faithful presence of Jesus in the world. We live lives of invitation that welcome the wounded, the broken-hearted, and the marginalized so that they can be find wholeness in the good news of grace, in Jesus.

Our vision, as the gathered people of God, is to accommodate the vision of Jesus and faithfully and collectively embody that vision in the time, and place, and amongst the people for whom we are uniquely responsible.

“But forget all that--- the former things--- it is nothing compared to what I am going to do. For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?”
Isaiah 43:18-19

This may be a bit of a, *“Thanks, Captain Obvious”*, statement, but vision never looks back. That’s called “history”, and the anticipated response is, “remember”. Remembering is celebrating or grieving our past. Vision is eager-expectation of a better future.

“What would our church look like in (5) years if we were to take this vision seriously?”