

 <p>The logo for Waiuku Assembly of God features a stylized sun with rays in yellow and orange, a blue cross, and the word 'Waiuku' in a blue script font. Below this, there are blue wavy lines representing water, and the words 'ASSEMBLY OF GOD' in a blue, sans-serif font.</p>	<p>Chris Woodham Senior Pastor PO Box 196 Waiuku 1852 PH: (09) 235 7341 MOB: (021) 187 1928 Email: waiukuag@wag.org.nz Web: www.wag.org.nz</p>
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Series	: <i>LIVING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD</i>
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Introduction

I'd like to show you a couple of pictures and ask you what the difference between them are...(on screen)

1. Marble Blocks vs. Statue
2. Cliff vs. Treasury Carving at Petra, Jordan
3. Log vs. Wood Carving

Now there are obviously several differences in all of these images; things like they required the intervention of people to create them, they took time and effort; they took commitment and skill and patience.

But most of all they took vision.

KJV Proverbs 29:18 *Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.*

Nothing is ever created or developed without vision. It takes someone to look at something as it presently is, but to see the future that is possible and decide to create that future.

George Barna, leading director of Barna Ministries – a research organisation that specializes in Christian Ministries writes: *“The purpose of vision is to create the future.”*¹

The future hold innumerable potentials and possibilities. Vision takes the overall mission and values of an individual or group, evaluates the present situation with the preferred future and charts a course to move from one to the other.

¹ George Barna, “The Power of Vision”

In terms of our individual Christian lives, we receive our mission from Jesus – which is to be His witnesses and to live our lives according to the 5 purposes of: Worship, Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry and Evangelism. Therefore, our preferred future is one of seeing those around us come to enjoy a relationship with Jesus and one of ourselves becoming more and more like Jesus.

Vision for our Christian lives looks at the present reality towards the preferred future and seeks God for the means by which He has uniquely gifted each of us personally to fulfil that preferred future.

In terms of our Church life, we receive our mission from Jesus, which is the same as that for each of us as individuals: Worship, Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry and Evangelism. So, as a church our preferred future is one where all members of our community are living these purposes and increasingly living in these purposes.

Vision for the Church then looks at the unique ways in which God has gifted and enabled His Church here to fulfil those purposes and reach the community of Waiuku in which we're placed. Vision takes the purposes and illuminates a path which God has mapped out for us to arrive at our preferred future.

Focusing Our Vision

Churches get really busy *doing things*. We get really busy *doing things*. It's not hard to fill your days and weeks with activities and work and chores and end up with no spare time at all isn't it?

Does anyone find it hard to use up the time they have?

The thing is though, unless we focus our energies on achieving something of significance – then all we're doing is using up time. Sure, we may *do* certain things – but if the things we do are unfocused then they're not going to be of any lasting significance are they?

Think about a building site; at the beginning there are piles of timber and cladding and bricks and all sorts of materials lying around the site. There are tools and contractors and all these things.

Now, I could rock on up, pick up a brick and make a nice pile, or I could lean some plank of wood up against each other and balance them well. I could even go as far as to pick up a hammer and fasten the planks together.

But without vision that house would never be constructed.

I'll stick with the building theme; even were we to assemble a team of skilled contractors and told them to start building a house; unless there was a vision for what the final result would look like – what's going to happen? Some of you builders out there can probably relate to this!

Everyone's going to get really busy trying to *do* something, but it won't be orderly work, it won't be cohesive – in short – even though some kind of structure may eventually come together – it certainly won't be something that reflects the full potential of what those materials or those contractors could have produced. And it certainly won't be something that's worth anything or will be lasting.

Even with the right materials, the right tools and the right skills – without vision all that happens is a lot of time gets wasted, a lot of people get really busy *doing things* and nothing of significance is ever accomplished.

Let's apply this to the church; in any given church there are willing people, there are skilled people, and even in the smallest churches there are resources that God has provided. So what usually happens is all these people get really busy but don't accomplish anything of lasting significance.

Robert D. Dale, in his book "O Dream Again" says: "*A church either plans to solve problems and survive, or plans to grow and thrive. The difference is vision.*"²

What we've been charged with working towards is of far greater importance than a house, or even a great Church – what we've been charged with is enlarging God's eternal family.

Without Kingdom Vision – that is, God's Vision for us – we can never accomplish anything significant or make the best use of what God's given us or reach our full potential.

Kingdom Vision is essential to the fulfilment of the Kingdom Mission.

Kingdom Mission Revisited

Last week we looked at the Mission of the Kingdom of God.

The Mission of the Kingdom is that all the follower's of Jesus will bear witness to what He has done. First in our town, then in our district, then in surrounding areas, and then to the ends of the earth.

² Robert D. Dale "O Dream Again"

This is a general mission and there are other elements to it. But very basically, if we want the Biblical definition for what God has created His Church to be we can state it very simply:

“A great commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission builds a Great Church.”³

This statement is one I first noticed in reading through some of Rick Warren’s material and have since found it in churches all over the place. Why?

They’re not copying Saddleback Church or embracing a new trend – they’ve looked at what Jesus commands the Church to do and have stripped away all the trimmings and things that we complicate it with and simply realise that as a Church, by focusing on the Great Commandment:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself.”⁴

And the Great Commission:

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”⁵

Then every Church will be working towards what is really important instead of getting caught up in the all sideline activities that often happen.

It’s almost too simple isn’t it? But this is the reason the Church exists and every single one of us exist.

From these we return to the five purposes in our lives:

1. Worship
2. Fellowship
3. Discipleship
4. Ministry
5. Evangelism

And can see that every single one of them supports the mission of the church – they provide a balanced way of approaching our core mission.

You’ve heard me say this many times before, Christianity is simple – but it’s not always easy.

³ Pastor Rick Warren, Saddleback Church Mission Statement.

⁴ Matthew 22:37-39, NIV

⁵ Matthew 28:19-20, NIV

Sure there are difficult concepts to understand, and understanding them does draw us closer to God as we grasp a greater revelation of Him; but in it's simplest form Christianity is simply having a relationship with God that means everything to us and as a result we want to please God with every fibre of our being and so obeying God comes naturally. It doesn't mean we always do things right – but our motives and desire are to please God out of love for Him.

Our mission as individuals and as a church is the same. These are the things Jesus commanded His followers to do and so whether we're a group of follower's in church, or whether we're living our daily lives in our places of work or wherever, the mission is the same.

Vision Clarifies Mission

Vision clarifies mission and enables us to plot a course towards fulfilment.

Our mission is clear, but it's rather obscure – sure, we know we need to love God and love each other and witness and walk alongside each other to develop our relationship with God. But how do we do that?

In the same way that without a clear plan a team of contractors will not be able to accomplish anything of significance, despite having the materials and skills to do so, so a Christian without God's vision is incapable of fully realizing the fulfilment of the Kingdom Mission, even though they may have the passion and the gifts, and the resources.

Last week we saw that when God gives a mission He also gives the enabling to fulfil it – in this case, the Holy Spirit.

We need to know that it doesn't end there. So far all we've got is the idea, the skills and the resources – what we lack is a plan to see the idea become a reality.

That plan is Kingdom Vision.

George Barna writes:

*“It is a simple idea: God created you, He has called you to a specific ministry, and He wants to impart to you His idea of what that ministry is and how best to accomplish His perfect outcomes through you. That's what His vision is about: maximizing your God-given potential to bless God and others through your commitment to doing **His work, His way.**”⁶ (my emphasis)*

⁶ George Barna, “The Power of Vision”

When Jesus sent out the disciples He gave them a mission and a vision, or plan, for accomplishing that mission.

NIV Matthew 10:1 *He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. ² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. ⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' ⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. ⁹ Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; ¹⁰ take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep. ¹¹ "Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave.*

Notice that Jesus gave the mission then detailed how it would be fulfilled. He even gave them a target group to minister to. This is not a new idea!

Exploring Kingdom Vision

During our *40 Days of Purpose* campaign we explored the idea that God gives special plans to individuals and to groups of believer's – or Churches.

We followed this up during our "Focus on Fellowship" series and today we'll touch on it again – because understanding this concept is essential to understanding Kingdom Vision.

GOD SPEAKS TO INDIVIDUALS

In the Bible God often spoke to individuals and gave them a mission and His vision for completing it.

Noah received a mission from God to save his family from the flood and to preserve life on the planet. Regardless of how we choose to interpret all the details in the Biblical account – God revealed His mission for Noah, and then gave specific instructions for the fulfilment of it, even down to the construction method and dimensions to use.

Abraham received a mission from God – a promise that God gave to him. What followed was a process of Abraham's obedience to each step of the vision that God revealed to him. There's a pattern of progressive revelation where each time Abraham obeyed, God then revealed the next step in the plan.

The there's Moses. God gave Moses a mission and then detailed His vision for fulfilling it. God gave Moses the strategy to see his God-given mission fulfilled.

Joshua received God's mission to conquer the Promised Land and at each step enquired of the Lord to receive God's vision for accomplishing what seemed, at times, like an impossible task.

Right throughout the Bible this same pattern of mission and vision are repeated over and over and over. Whenever we see a pattern in the Bible we need to take note of it and apply it to our lives.

GOD SPEAKS TO GROUPS OF PEOPLE

We can also see a pattern in the Bible of God speaking to groups of people. Again, He gives a mission and then reveals His vision for seeing it become a reality.

There's the numerous missions and visions given to the Children of Israel, there is the mission and vision given to the exiles to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and the temple, there's the commands Jesus gives to His followers and the methods He reveals for fulfilling them – like we looked at last week, and in Revelation we see God's message to the seven Churches in Asia.

So not only does God speak to individuals, but He also speaks to groups of His followers – to Churches.

As a church and as individuals our mission is clear. But there are numerous ways we could attempt to fulfil it, however, God has a specific plan – unique to us – that will enable us to most effectively fulfil that mission with the gifts, resources and circumstances in which we operate.

There's that bizarre saying “there's many ways to skin a cat”, likewise, in our Kingdom Mission, there are many things we can do and methods we can employ to fulfil it – but there are some that are more effective than others.

We just need to discover God's Vision for the fulfilment of His mission in our individual life and church life.

Receiving Kingdom Vision - Corporately

We've touched on two areas of Kingdom Vision is this message; Kingdom Vision for our personal lives, and Kingdom Vision for our corporate lives – that is, for the Church.

We're mainly going to look at Personal Kingdom Vision in this message because what we're looking for is things that we can all apply in our everyday lives, right? Before we get to that, though, let me touch briefly on Kingdom Vision for God's Church here in Waiuku.

The big question we need to ask is "how do we discover what God's Vision is?"

Let me clarify this again, vision is not an executive catch phrase or snappy slogan. Vision is not a cheerful and optimistic moral booster.

Kingdom Vision is God's unique plan for individuals and His Church to fulfil our God-given mission with the people, skills, resources and circumstances God has given and placed us in. Vision is unique to individuals and churches because every person and every church is unique.

The mission is always the same, but the means of accomplishing it effectively are unique. So as a Church, how do we know what God's vision is for us?

Well, one of my responsibilities is to spend time praying and seeking God for His plans for us all. I need to look at a whole lot of different aspect of God's Church here: our community, gifts, prophetic words, personalities, needs, strengths, weaknesses, passions, history...

All of these things are pieces which, together, form the vision God has for us.

As Penny and I work through all these things and discuss them with the leadership teams and in general conversation with you and other people outside of the church whom we respect, God reveals more and more of His vision for us.

God's vision is not a new direction or a change in our course – but a continuation onto the next leg of the journey He's planned for us.

God's vision is not something we can dream up and it's not something that will be short-lived. God's vision is something far bigger than any of us could imagine – we just need to discern it and jump on board.

It's been a big learning curve for Penny and I to grasp this whole vision concept but more and more we realise how vital it is for us individually and as a Church.

It's not something we can rush though, because it's something that God reveals.

The further along the path we go though, the simpler it all seems.

We're going to be talking about this in greater detail as we progress along this path – but basically, God's got awesome plans for His Church here. We know that because our God is a good God and His Word says that His plans are good, in fact, let's read that awesome passage from the prophet Jeremiah:

NIV Jeremiah 29:11-14 *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."*

Man, I love that passage!

Let's move on...

Receiving Kingdom Vision - Individually

Receiving God's vision for our lives is much simpler because there's only one of us to take into account, only one of us to study and understand.

You're going to like this – finding God's vision for you is simple, but it's not easy. It's not easy because it requires discipline and patience and perseverance.

Does God deliberately make it difficult? No, but I believe we need to make a commitment to discovering His vision, Kingdom Vision, for our lives before He'll let us loose with such a powerful thing.

Here's how to discover Kingdom Vision: ask God for it.

There you go, simple huh?

But I'll bet many people have never even thought to ask God for it. Many people ask God for ability, for Spiritual Gifts, for blessing and healing and strength and even wisdom. But how many of us actually stop to ask God what is the unique and most effective way that He has created us to use the gifts He's given us in the situations He's placed us to fulfil the mission He's charged us with?

This stuff isn't for the super-spiritual people out there, it's way too simple! This isn't reserved just for the mighty men and women of God; Kingdom Vision is essential for EVERY SINGLE ONE OF US to be fully effective and reach our potential for God and accomplish the mission He's charged us with.

Let's got through some pointers – I'm sure by now you can all tell me what they'll be because the answer to nearly everything in our Christian lives is the same: do the basics well and keep doing them!

1. Pray – talk with God, chat with Him; ask Him how you can be most effective in reaching the people He's put you in contact with through the gifts He's given you. Pray and pray and pray and pray! Pastor Jack Hayford, in his great book "Prayer is Invading the Impossible" writes:

*"Few things stifle prayer more than the fact that, too often, we don't know what to pray for. We are hesitant to ask for something that we're not sure if we should have; to request God's action when we feel we lack the facts; to pray, for fear that our request may run crosscurrent to God's intended plan." He goes on: "The solution is simple: God's will is that we ask. Solving what His will is isn't my problem."*⁷

We discover God's will *through* prayer – not be waiting to try and discover it *before* we pray! So just get into, ask God and let Him speak to you as you spend time with Him, allowing Him to reveal His will. But get on with praying!

2. Read your Bible – make sure you spend time regularly reading God's Word. Through it He will speak to you, as you read the Holy Spirit will transform your thoughts and heart to be more like Jesus. God's Word is the truth with which to fight the lies of the enemy. Get into it regularly. Before you start reading pray, then afterwards pray and think about it. Ask God to speak to you through the Bible and help you understand it.
3. Put your Faith into Action – Make the most of every opportunity to put your faith into action and to learn to hear the voice of God. Pray for parking spaces, pray for wisdom in which route to take to work to avoid the traffic, pray for wisdom when you go to meet someone or speak with someone, pray for opportunities to share your relationship with Jesus. Do these things and practice them. You won't always get them right – but when you don't you'll have learnt what God's voice doesn't sound like!

These things are so simple, they're almost embarrassingly simple. It's always nice to be able to share some deep truth, some hidden gem, but to be honest, what could be more profound than realising that the most powerful thing to unlocking our real potential is these things that are so simple ALL OF US can do them?

⁷ Jack W. Hayford, "Prayer is Invading the Impossible"

Conclusion

This has been a bit of a different message, lot's of exploring this whole concept and a different way of thinking.

Traditionally many Churches have failed in this area of Kingdom Vision, but I believe – and we're witnessing today all over the world – that God is restoring this element of Kingdom Vision to enable us to again be powerful and effective in reaching our communities.

God's Vision is not something He tries to hide from us, it's not something that is difficult to receive or restricted to the "Spiritual Elite."

God has given us a mission and desires that we receive His vision for the fulfilment of it – we just need to ask for it and take the time and effort to pursue it until we do receive it.

Do the basics well and do them consistently and God will bless you and He will bless His Church here as we do this together.

Kingdom Vision is the thing that sets apart people who just *do things* and those who do *amazing things* with *amazing results*.

I want to finish with reading from the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah received a vision from God to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem which had been completely destroyed. He rallied the people and achieved this amazing feat, but listen to how he received God's Kingdom Vision for this awesome task:

NIV Nehemiah 1:3 *They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." ⁴ When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.*

What did he do? He had a passion, or a burden. Then he fasted and prayed. Simple huh?

What about you?