

Gaining Vision

Proverbs 29:18; Psalm 121:1-2; Isaiah 6:1-9

1. Look Upward

...and see the Lord

- *Isaiah 6:1, 40:21-22, 46:9-10; Revelation 22:13;*
Mark 1:15; Matthew 13:13

2. Look Inward

...and see yourself

- *Isaiah 6:5; 2 Corinthians 13:5; Luke 6:41-42;*
Psalm 51:6

* Divine Desperation

- *Isaiah 6:5*

* Divine Dependence

- *John 15:5*

* Divine Dispensation

- *Isaiah 6:6-7; John 3:19-21*

3. Look Outward

...and see the need

- *Isaiah 6:8-9; Matthew 20:26-27;*
Matthew 23:11-12; 2 Corinthians 5:14



West Valley Church
Michael W. O'Neill
06/23/2019

Gaining Vision

Two weeks ago it was Pentecost Sunday – a day the church commemorates as the day that the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God, was given to us to be in our lives – making our physical bodies the literal Temple of God, and making us the Church, the Body of Christ. We talked about what the Holy Spirit does within us, making us like Christ, holy and filled with power to be his witnesses in this world. Last week, we talked about the fact that, with the Holy Spirit in our lives, we are leaders in this world – every single believer in Jesus is a leader. We compared and contrasted Christ-like leadership with the types of leadership the world around us celebrate and follow. We came up with a definition of a leader, remember?

“A leader is a person of
love and integrity who influences people with
love and service to accomplish a purpose –
bringing the Kingdom of God here on earth.”

I hope that was encouraging and inspiring to you, to learn that you are a leader no matter what type of personality you have or what type of job or level of education or position in society you have. If you are a Christian, you are a person of influence in this world.

But what do we do next? How do we figure out what that means for our lives; how do we each live that out? Well there are more answers to that than people in this room because it's unique for every Christ-follower. Answering that question is part of what we do in the Ministry 103 core class – we help you figure out what that means for *you*. We'll offer that again in the fall. What I *can* do is give you some general guidelines and biblical principles so that you can then take those and follow the Holy Spirit's leading more specifically in your life, so that you can see more clearly how God wants to use your influence in this world.

Figuring out our influence in this world can sometimes be a difficult thing when there are so many voices telling us so many different things. Self-help books have become the major market for booksellers with new ones coming out every day: “ten steps to success,” “three steps to financial freedom,” “six steps to the secret of weight loss,” “five steps to giving your cat a bath,” or whatever else is out there.

A poll was conducted of Americans not too long ago asking them what they would change in their lives if they could. 45% said they would change a bad habit. Over 64% would change their wealth. 55% would change their weight. 32% would change their intelligence (I assume they want to make themselves *more* intelligent, not less). We all want help and we know we need it.

But with all that advice floating around out there, it's no wonder we are confused and directionless. Those self-help books might be all well and good, but I submit that if you are

looking to *those* things for your *ultimate* answers, you are looking in the wrong direction. So where do we look for purpose and direction in life? The Bible tells us:

“Where there is no vision, the people perish, but he who keeps the law, he is blessed.” (Proverbs 29:18, nkjv)

Another translation says:

“If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; but when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed.” (Proverbs 29:18, tmt)

In other words, we lose self-control and are directionless without a compelling vision for our lives. And yet even if we look to the Bible it can seem overwhelming; it's a big book with little print and really thin pages. Even the Bible can seem confusing sometimes. But the writer of the Psalms was right when he said:

“I look up to the mountains—does my help come from there? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth!” (Psalm 121:1-2, nlt)

So where do you look, and how, in order to get a clearer perspective on life and the direction it should take? I can tell you that it would be wrong of me to try and tell you what the *specific* direction of your life should be. If I know you, and I pray about it, I *might* be able to give you some advice or point you in a specific direction to consider. But it's up to *you* to decide – with the guidance of the Holy Spirit – how God wants to use you in this world and what he wants you to do with your life. An eye doctor won't tell you *what* you should be looking *at*; she just helps you to see it more clearly. That's what I want to do today – to help you see more clearly so that you can have a much better perspective on God's direction for you, personally. I believe God wants to help you find vision for your life. So where do you start?

God has a vision for our church and this community on this corner; it's exciting, it's bold, and it's clear. And we see it and are moving toward it. We are doing a wonderful job of loving and serving our neighbors with our school partnerships, with Upward Soccer and Science Camps and Science Night On Tuesdays, with Backpack to School and with things like Trunk or Treat and Breakfast with Santa. God has been leading us as we've helped build that church and community center in Victoria, Guyana that we'll help dedicate very soon. We are an incredibly generous and giving church as we serve our neighbors and welcome them with hospitality. I will tell you that early next year we are going to begin a significant effort, with all of us working together, to eliminate our mortgage and do some necessary updating of our facility. Getting rid of our mortgage will save us \$500,000 in interest, and it will also free up over \$90,000 a year in our budget for ministry! Imagine what we could do with that! *You* have a part to play in that because God has led you here, and we can't imagine doing any of these amazing things without you!

But there is also an exciting, bold, compelling vision that God has for *your* life, personally, for your home, your work, and school, and all the places of your life. So how do you find it?

To gain that vision, there are three places we need to look, and we are going to learn this from the Old Testament Prophet Isaiah and an encounter he had with God.

It's found in Isaiah 6:1-9 in the Bible. Would you stand with me while I read it us?

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.

And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

He said, “Go and tell this people...” (Isaiah 6:1-9, niv)

Isaiah gained a vision for his life from this encounter, and we can learn from this how to gain the same work of the Holy Spirit for our lives. In Isaiah’s experience, we see the three places to look for our life’s vision, and first we need to...

1. Look ***Upward***

If we are going to have a clear vision for our lives, it starts by looking upward to God. Not to the hills or mountains, like the Psalmist said in the verse we read earlier:

“I look up to the mountains—does my help come from there? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth!” (Psalm 121:1-2, nlt)

We need to look upward and **see the *Lord***. It all starts by getting our eyes on Jesus!

I want you to see the circumstances in Isaiah’s life when he had that vision. Remember it said, “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord.” (vs. 1) What you may not know is that King Uzziah was a righteous and godly king – he was a very good man. But he died. And it was *after* the king died that Isaiah saw the Lord. There’s something that’s important about this and here’s why: things were going good for Isaiah and the people; they had a good king and things couldn’t be better. The problem was, it was easy for them to depend on this good king and *not* the Lord. Do you know how that goes? When things are going well, we don’t depend on the Lord so much. We don’t look to him as often. And sometimes God will use the removal of whatever it is we’re trusting in, in order for us to see *him* clearly and to see what he wants us to do with our lives. If we want vision, we *must* look past anything or anyone that we depend on, and look to the *Lord alone*.

What's going good in your life? Look past it for the Lord. Are you comfortable financially? Look past it for the Lord. Do you have a good job and a good house? Look past it for the Lord. A good wife, a good husband, a good family? A good job? If you are a Christian – which means you have accepted Jesus' death in your place on the cross and his resurrection from the dead and you have given your life to him – you order your life around Jesus – if you are a Christian, you need to look past those good things. Count those things as blessings, which they are, but don't count *on* them – don't come to rely on them. Look past the blessings and start to see the Lord. If you really want vision you have to look upward and see the Lord.

But you also need to know that after King Uzziah died, his grandson Ahaz took the throne. Ahaz was very evil and ungodly. *Now* things were going to get very bad, and bad in a hurry. Here's what that means for you: you might say, "The circumstances of my life are terrible. I don't have enough money, (or) my spouse is leaving me, (or) I've lost my job, (or) my kids are getting into trouble, (or) I have a serious threat to my health or my finances..." Whatever your bad circumstances are, you are going to have to look upward and quit looking at your circumstances. Maybe you've sinned and you are ashamed to look up to God. Or you might even say, "My life is so messed up, I've made some bad decisions, things are so bad, I've got to get things together before I can have any kind of vision." But listen: you don't straighten your life up *before* you come to Jesus; you come to Jesus to straighten up your life! This passage should encourage you, because *in the middle* of Isaiah's looming difficulties, he saw the Lord! So can you. Now is the *perfect* time to look up and see the Lord! In doing so you gain *His* perspective. There is a writer and speaker by the name of Madeleine L'Engle who said, "I have a point of view. You have a point of view. God has view." God's view isn't just one point; his view is 360 degrees up down, side to side, all around. He sees it all. We need, and can gain, his big-picture view.

Isaiah says in Chapter 40:

"Don't you know who made everything? Haven't you heard about him? Hasn't it been told to you from the beginning? Haven't you understood it ever since the earth was made? God sits on his throne high above the earth. Its people look like grasshoppers to him. He spreads the heavens out like a cover. He sets it up like a tent to live in." (Isaiah 40:21-22, nirv)

Now that's "view"! God says he knows the end from the beginning:

"Remember what happened in the past. Think about what took place long ago. I am God. There is no other God. I am God. There is no one like me. Before something even happens, I announce how it will end. In fact, from times long ago I announced what was still to come. I say, 'My plan will succeed. I will do anything I want to do.'" (Isaiah 46:9-10, nirv)

He's not just talking about world events; he's talking about your life, too. He knows the ending before it even begins, and he knows what's in-between. In fact, he himself IS the beginning and the end of everything:

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." (Revelation 22:13, nlt)

So we need to look upward and see the Lord because he has the ultimate view that we need. You must look to Him. I could go on and on about this, but my question for you is, how hungry are you to see him? How badly do you want to see him? He's closer than you know, but you've got to look! Jesus said:

"The right time has come, and the Kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News!" (Mark 1:15, gnb)

Many of us remember on May 18 when Mt. St. Helens erupted. It was a Sunday morning. I was 17 years old in our living room in Salem, Oregon, and heard the sound and felt the shake, and I lived over 120 miles away. I'm told that the explosion, which was like a nuclear bomb, was heard as far as 600 miles away. It killed 57 people. Many of you were in this church when the blackness rolled in and the ash started to fall. Yakima was right in the path of the of the ash cloud.

Can you imagine being right next to it when it blew? Can you imagine the shock wave and the wall of mud and water that came down the canyon?

There were a number of men and women who were rescued within a few miles of the mountain, and they testified to something amazing. They did not hear the explosion! Some, a mile or two away, thought that the darkened sky from the immediate blast was cloud cover and rain. How could that be?

They were in what is called a "zone of silence." Scientists explain that the incredible upward thrust of the exploding mountain sent the sound of the event upward into the atmosphere where it bounced back to earth (several times), but in intervals outward and away from ground zero.

So although people like Harry Truman were right next to the disaster (remember him, on the shores of Spirit Lake in the shadow of the volcano?), they wouldn't have heard anything unless they were looking at the mountain at the moment it erupted.

Jesus quoted Isaiah 6:9-10 when he said this:

"For they look, but they don't really see. They hear, but they don't really listen or understand." (Matthew 13:13, nlt)

It was possible for people standing right there next to Jesus, looking at him and listening to him, and not hear his words. It's just as possible today to not hear what's being said right in front of you. It's possible to be this close to God and never see him! You *must* look past whatever you are depending on or whatever your circumstances might be, no matter how consuming they are, and see the Lord. Look upward!

Then...

2. Look *Inward*

Like Isaiah, if you are willing to see the Lord, you must then look inward and **see *yourself***. Isaiah's response to seeing God was to realize his own sinful condition, so he said, "woe is me for I am a sinful man!" If you and I are going to gain any kind of clear vision for our lives, we must always be willing to do an honest self-examination before God, and we must be

willing to be brutally honest and take a look at ourselves and see what is so clear to God. The Apostle Paul said:

“Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine...” (2 Corinthians 13:5, nlt)

It’s easy for us to see the faults and weaknesses and shortcomings of others, but if we really want to gain vision it starts with seeing the Lord and then having inward honesty. Isaiah looked inside and saw a very sinful man.

Jesus instructed us by saying:

“How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.” (Luke 6:42, niv)

I like how the Message Bible unpacks that verse:

“It's easy to see a smudge on your neighbor's face and be oblivious to the ugly sneer on your own. Do you have the nerve to say, 'Let me wash your face for you,' when your own face is distorted by contempt? It's this I-know-better-than-you mentality again, playing a holier-than-thou part instead of just living your own part. Wipe that ugly sneer off your own face and you might be fit to offer a washcloth to your neighbor.” (Luke 6:41-42, tmt)

God wants us to look inward, as the Bible tells us this about God:

“Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part You shall make me to know wisdom.” (Psalm 51:6, nkjv)

This kind of heart-honesty will always results in three steps – *always* – so write these down. The first is that you will experience a...

Divine *Desperation*

Remember that after Isaiah saw the Lord and saw himself, he declared:

"How terrible it is for me!" I cried out. "I'm about to be destroyed! My mouth speaks sinful words." (Isaiah 6:5)

When we look at ourselves honestly we’re going to see some stuff we don’t like – the ugly stuff, the sin, the bad attitudes, and we’ll see that we *must* have God’s help.

Following this, then, comes the realization that it takes...

Divine *Dependence*

We’ll realize that if we are to keep that awful stuff out of our lives, we must be dependent on God. Jesus pointed this out when he said:

“Apart from me, you can do nothing.” (John 15:5, niv)

We desperately need to depend completely on Christ, which then means we receive...

Divine *Dispensation*

Dispensation is a big theological word that simply means a pouring out or giving out from God to, and into, your life. This happened for Isaiah symbolically when the angel took the coal from the altar and touched it to Isaiah's lips, which was the point of the problem for Isaiah (Isaiah 6:6-7). We learned on Pentecost Sunday what this means for us – that the Holy Spirit will be poured out into our hearts, which is the point of our problem – our sinful hearts. God will go to the heart of the matter, cleanse your life of sin, and move into the very center of your life, if you'll invite him. He will pour himself out at the point of the problem or issue in your life in order to take care of it, to forgive, cleanse, and heal it. That's what happened for Isaiah:

“He touched my mouth with the coal. He said, ‘This has touched your lips. Your guilt has been taken away. Your sin has been paid for.’” (Isaiah 6:7, nirv)

When we honestly see our own ugliness, the selfishness, the sin and mess of our lives we realize how desperately we must depend on God. We confess that to him, and when we do he can be completely, totally counted on to forgive us of our sins, and then He pours out (dispenses) his forgiveness and love and cleanses us so we can see clearly and pours out his Spirit into our lives. I know this isn't easy; our tendency is to avoid this.

Jesus said:

“This is how the judgment works: the light has come into the world, but people love the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds are evil. Those who do evil things hate the light and will not come to the light, because they do not want their evil deeds to be shown up. But those who do what is true come to the light in order that the light may show that what they did was in obedience to God.” (John 3:19-21, gnb)

So to gain vision, we must look upward and see the Lord, look inward and see ourselves, and finally we've got to...

3. Look ***Outward***

When you look upward and see the Lord, then you will look inward and honestly see yourself. Finally, to gain true vision for your life you will then look outward and **see the *need***. You'll see the needs of others around you. The very next thing Isaiah heard was God:

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord. He said, ‘Who will I send? Who will go for us?’ I said, ‘Here I am. Send me!’ So he said, ‘Go and speak to these people.’” (Isaiah 6:8-9, nirv)

If you genuinely want true vision for your life, it will always involve you doing things for someone else, meeting the needs of someone else.

Karl Meninger, the late psychiatrist, was asked what someone should do who feels on the verge of a nervous breakdown. His advice was this: “Lock your house, go across the railroad tracks, find someone in need and do something for him.” Even a secular psychologist understood that service and love is what we were created for. I don't care who you think you are, or what you do, or how “important” you might think yourself to be, or how long you've been in this church, or what type of personality you have. I don't care how insignificant you think you are. You are here to serve. Jesus didn't die for you just so you could go to heaven.

If that were the case, then why are you still here? Why? Is there a backlog in heaven or something? Why haven't you left yet? If Jesus saved you just so you could go to heaven, surely he could arrange it for you to get there as soon as you are saved. So why are you still sucking oxygen? I'll tell you why: it is because you were saved for a purpose and your vision will include seeing the needs of those around you and becoming a servant. Is that uncomfortable for you? If so, I'm sorry, because this is what Jesus said:

"It's not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave." (Matthew 20:26-27, gnb)

And again he said:

"The greatest one among you must be your servant. Whoever makes himself great will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be made great." (Matthew 23:11-12, gnb)

You were saved to serve, in order to help people see God and turn to him and be saved. You were not saved to sit in Sunday school or Bible Studies or Sunday services, as important as those are. *You were saved to serve so others could be saved.* When you were saved, did you get abundant life? Yes. Did you get entrance into heaven someday? Yes. But the purpose for you in *this* life is to serve others so they might be introduced to Jesus through you, so that Jesus might save them. That's how you glorify God while you are here. Jesus said:

"For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it." (Mark 8:35, niv)

When you see the Lord, in contrast to the dreadfulness of your own sin, know that when you are cleansed and forgiven because of Jesus, and God will fill you with his Spirit. And the first thing God will ask is "will you go?" You will see the needs around you and you will be compelled to meet those needs and help people meet Jesus. The Apostle Paul said:

"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died." (2 Corinthians 5:14, niv)

Does Christ's love compel you?

It takes a willing heart. You know, God could have *told* Isaiah to go; he could have demanded him to go. God could have forced Isaiah to go. Instead, God *asked*. He wanted to know if Isaiah was willing. And God asks us, he asks you. Are we willing to go? Are you willing to go out into the world, develop genuine friendships, loving and serving others, especially those who don't know Jesus? It was not a difficult decision for Isaiah at that point, because he'd already seen the Lord, he'd seen himself, he'd been forgiven and filled and he'd seen the need. So he couldn't help but say, "Here I am! Send me!" Will you?

It's what we are called to do. It's the only way you will reach God's vision for your life. It's the only way our church will reach God's vision for us. And it starts with you gaining the vision for your own life.

Pray