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*re***vision**TM

reflection guide

a participant's guide through the eight sessions
of the reflection series

Reflection Participant Guide

ReVision Strategic Planning Program

Version 1.5 July 1, 1998

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Printed in the United States of America.

98 99 00 - 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 0-926850-11-3

Reflection Series

Participant's Guide

The Reflection Series is designed to assist your church in a process of re-visioning its life and ministry for the 21st century. Using both the Context Report and biblical teachings, you will be stretched to think about who you are and where you need to move in the future.

The Reflection studies assume that, at some time in your history, your church had a vision for ministry in this community. As communities change and congregations evolve, often the original vision that gave meaning to the life and work of a church no longer provides adequate direction. Thus the need to "vision again" or, if you will, re-vision.

Over the course of EIGHT sessions you will:

- ❑ *Reflect upon your collective Vision for the work of your church.*
- ❑ *Learn some new concepts about mission and ministry.*
- ❑ *Reflect upon some key biblical passages which set forth important principles of ministry.*
- ❑ *Provide the ReVision Task Force with your collective reflections on some of the findings of the Context Report and what you believe are priorities for you in your life together in mission.*
- ❑ *Reflect upon the current mission of your church.*
- ❑ *Celebrate areas where you see God's faithful work among you.*

To assist you personally in this process, this Participant Guide has been provided. It is designed to be used in conjunction with the Reflection Series studies. Most of the time, its structure will parallel that of the Leader's Guide. The Participant's Guide can be used in two ways.

- ❑ *To provide an opportunity to study ideas and concepts prior to each study.*

- ❑ *To provide an outline to follow during each study.*

There are eight studies in the Reflection Series.

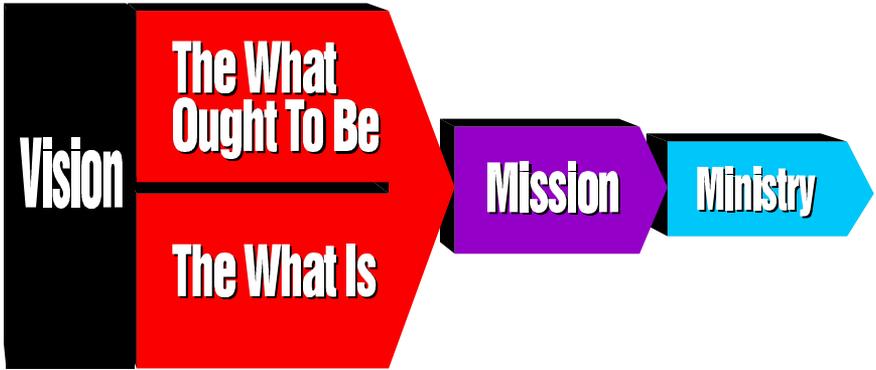
- ❑ *A Bold Vision*
- ❑ *Discovering Our Context*
- ❑ *Defining Our Gap*
- ❑ *A Call to Mission*
- ❑ *Visualizing our Mission*
- ❑ *Bring Down the Barriers*
- ❑ *Keeping the Main Thing, The Main Thing*
- ❑ *A Question*

Space is provided for writing responses in this guide.

A Bold Vision

Session One

The ReVision program is framed by the ReVision Planning Model.¹ The model—and this study—moves from Vision, to Mission, to Ministry and Program.



As the diagram indicates, the first step in this journey focuses on vision.

The Role of Vision

REFLECT

- ❑ *What comes to mind when you consider the word “vision”?*

¹ *The ReVision Planning Model was developed by the Percept Group, Inc. specifically for local church planning. It also provides the conceptual framework for Percept’s regional and national church agency planning program called VISTA.*

- ❑ *How would you define “vision”?*

- ❑ *What you would like to see in your life or what would you like to accomplish before you die? Take a few moments to write some thoughts on this.*

The role of vision can be compared to the task of navigation.

- ❑ *What are the two things a person needs to know before going anywhere?*

- ❑ *What if you only know where you are?*

- ❑ *What if you only know where you want to go?*

Let’s take this idea further.

- ❑ *What happens when there is no vision, when neither the current nor the future condition has been defined?*

- ❑ *What difference would those definitions make? What would happen?*

KEY PRINCIPLE: THE TWO CONDITIONS OF A CLEAR VISION ARE THE CURRENT CONDITION AND THE DESIRED CONDITION.

Now let’s consider this from the standpoint of your church.

- ❑ *What role do you think vision plays or could play in a local congregation?*

KEY PRINCIPLE: WITHOUT CLEAR VISION, WE WANDER AIMLESSLY.

Isaiah's Vision: The Great Exchange

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. — Isaiah 61: 1-3

Notice that this passage is a series of exchanges, which we'll now categorize as negative and positive.

REFLECT AND CREATE TABLE

<i>Negative</i>	<i>Positive</i>

It's a Matter of Time

Another feature of the Isaiah 61 passage is significant for our discussion.

- ❑ *When is the negative true?*
- ❑ *When is the positive true?*

The Hope of Paul

Just as we saw in Isaiah 61, we see in the theology of the apostle Paul a "nowness" about the negative and a "thenness" about that which will be true when God's Anointed One completes the messianic work.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. — Romans 8:18-25

NOW and THEN

Like Isaiah, Paul draws a sharp distinction between the NOW and the THEN. NOW Paul suffers, but THEN the glory that is the purpose of God's plan of salvation will be complete and wondrously evident.

CREATE TABLE

Using words and phrases from Romans 8, list the NOW and THEN aspects of what Paul says.

<i>Current (NOW)</i>	<i>Future (THEN)</i>

The End of Death

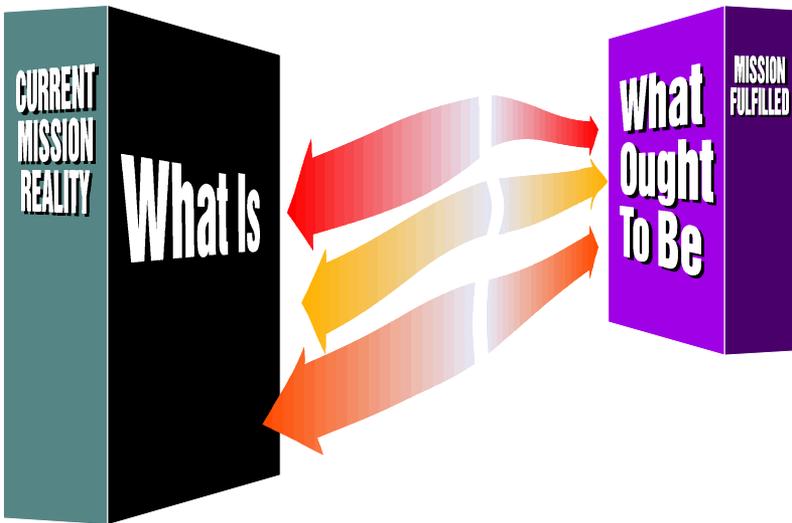
In Paul's theology, the goal of salvation is the final and complete freeing of the children of God (and creation itself) from all the pain and agony caused by our sin and experienced in this fallen world. The Bible sums up what ultimately plagues our humanity and all of creation in one word: DEATH.

KEY PRINCIPLE: THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL— FOUND THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST — IS THAT ONE DAY WE WILL BE *WHOLE AND FULLY ALIVE*.

Today we are broken, suffering the reality of death on every front, but one day we will be set free of death. We will be whole persons, filled fully with the life and glory of God. Death will be no more.

Between NOW and THEN: A Great Gap

Our ministry exists in the NOW, and our hope is in the THEN. And there is a vast gap between the two. We could describe this as a gap between what is (what we currently know and live) and what ought to be (what we hope for).



KEY PRINCIPLE: A GAP EXISTS BETWEEN OUR CURRENT CONTEXTUAL REALITY AND WHAT GOD INTENDS WHEN REDEMPTION IS COMPLETE.

Both of these conditions must contribute to the vision we develop for our church.

What does acknowledging the NOW and the THEN look like on a practical level? As we articulate a vision for our church, what will we say to encompass both conditions?

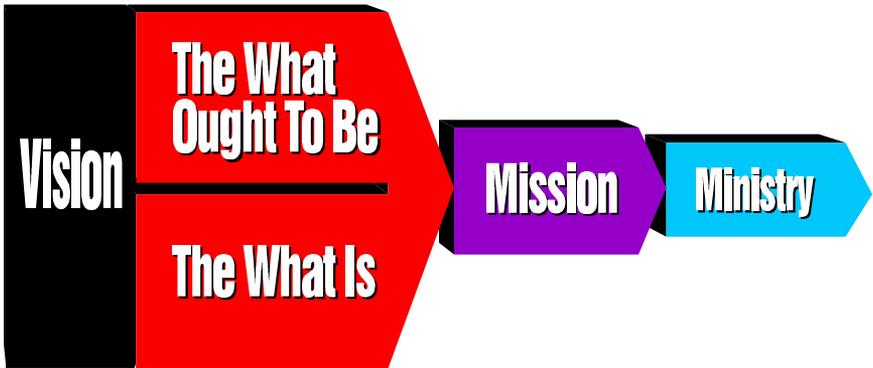
Summary

What have you learned about vision so far?

This is the first level of your reflection on vision. In the next two sessions, you will focus of on your own mission context.

Discovering Our Context

Session Two



In the first study, you began to explore a biblical vision of the hope of the gospel promise that one day the pain and suffering that plague our current world will be swallowed up by life.

You discovered the following principles about vision.

- ❑ *A gap exists between your current contextual reality and what God intends when redemption is complete.*
- ❑ *We long for this gap to close: we want what is to give way to what ought to be.*
- ❑ *Ultimately, what ought to be is people whole and fully alive.*

Of course we will never close the gap completely, but we believe that God has called us to give ourselves to the effort and that, in real ways, the gap can begin to close.

Still focusing on vision in this session, you will first look at specific information about your mission context. Your primary task is to become acquainted with the Context Report and begin to relate it to

the notion of vision. (You will continue to use the Context Report throughout the remaining sessions.)

The Meaning of "Mission Context"

In the previous study, you learned that vision encompasses two conditions: what ought to be and what is. "Mission context" is the what is. "Mission context" is the environment in which we live and minister, and it has both a near and far component.

The Far Side of Mission Context: On the far side, mission context means the larger world for which you are responsible to share God's Good News and his love. This mission context is beyond your local setting.

The Near Side of Mission Context: On the near side, mission context is the community in which you live and work. For the rest of this Reflection Study, you will focus on the near side.

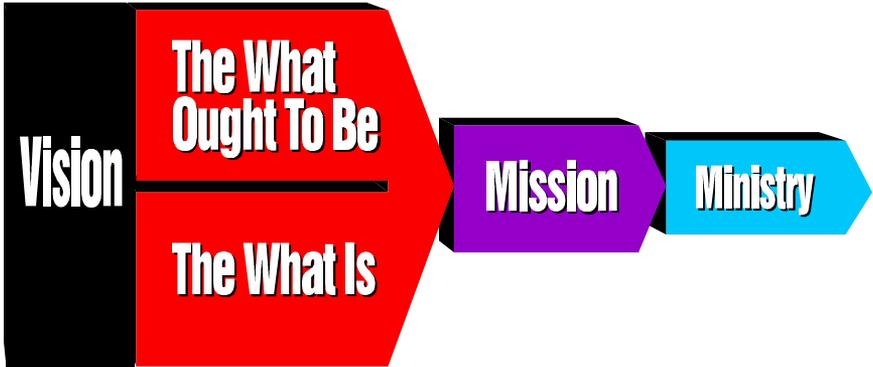
A Walk through Context

Understanding mission context, you are ready to take a look at the status of your mission context. The Context Report is designed specifically for this purpose.

Open to page 1, "Getting Started." Work through the series of questions and answers. Pay special attention to the seven parts and the focus of each. Note that each section of the Context Report opens with an introductory page containing key information and some discussion questions. Use these to guide you through the report.

Defining Our Gap

Session Three



Vision is comprised of two conditions.

- ❑ *The NOW - The current reality; what is.*
- ❑ *The THEN - The desired reality; what ought to be.*

At the highest level, the Bible and your theological traditions offer a picture of the NOW and the THEN. They tell us about both humanity's great need to be free of sin and death (what is, the NOW) and God's plan of salvation (what ought to be, the THEN). We experience the NOW more specifically in our particular mission context.

In the preceding session, you began examining your mission context. Using the Context Report, you started to develop a picture of your what is as preparation for defining the gap in your community and in your church.

WOTS Up

To start your thinking process, spend some time answering the following four questions.²

The External Environment

- ❑ *What potential threats to your church's life and vitality do you see?*

- ❑ *What opportunities for your church's future mission and ministry do you see?*

The Internal Environment

- ❑ *What weaknesses have you noticed or do you see reflected in the Context Report?*

- ❑ *What strengths have you noticed or do you see reflected in the Context Report?*

² WOTS up stands for Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats and Strengths.

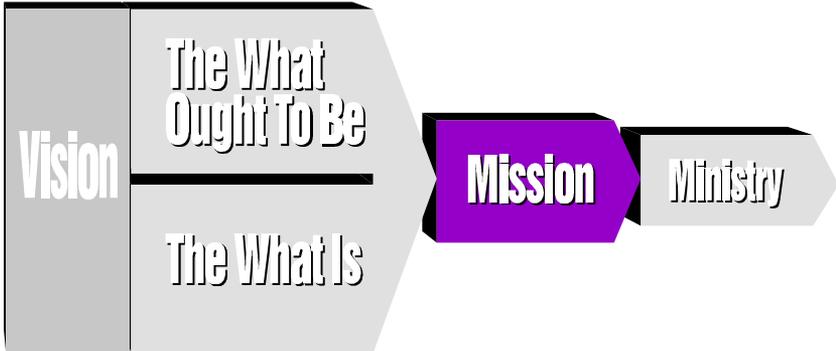
Summary

ADDED QUESTIONS In what areas of our current mission context do we significantly diverge from the community? What ought to be? In other words, summarize what the gap looks like in your particular mission context. Do not prescribe what should be done. Simply describe what is.

In the next session, you will explore how this emerging vision translates into mission.

A Call to Mission

Session Four



In the first three sessions, you explored the concept of vision and the role it must play in your congregation's life and work. You found that vision must be comprised of two elements: the hope of the gospel (what ought to be) and your current mission context (what is). Together, these elements define where you are and where you need to go.

You also discovered that a great gap exists between what is and what ought to be and that this gap calls you to mission. That mission is to close the gap in some qualitative and substantial way. The ultimate goal is that people would be whole and fully alive in Christ.

Of course we will never completely close the gap between what is and what ought to be. Nevertheless we believe that God has called us to work towards that end and that, in real ways, the gap can begin to close. The idea of convergence gives us a picture of what it means to close the gap. Convergence means either there was no gap between two things or that the gap has been closed.

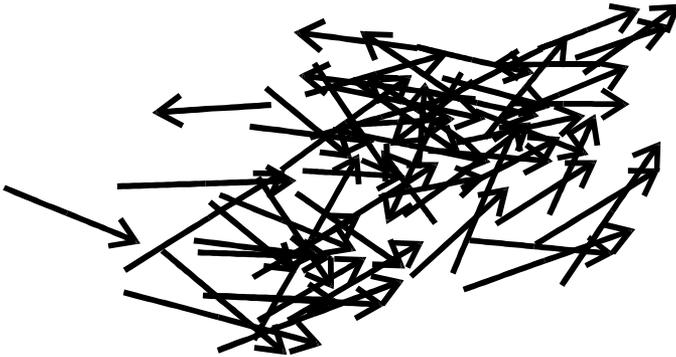
The Role of Vision in Mission

The question you must address is “How does vision impact your understanding of mission?”

REFLECT

This graphic shows a pile of arrows. These arrows represent every program and ministry of a local church and the direction each is headed.

- ❑ *What does this picture say to you? What does this image communicate about the mission of the church?*
- ❑ *What happens when the ministries of a church are headed in so many different directions?*



The arrows (the church’s programs and ministries) need to be aligned along a single trajectory, and a clear vision does this for a church. Review the following graphic.



Now think about your church.

- ❑ *In what ways does it seem like people are pulling against each other within the life and ministry of your church?*

- ❑ *What impact does this pulling have on your effectiveness?*

KEY PRINCIPLE: A CLEAR VISION WILL ENABLE US TO ALIGN OUR EFFORTS SO THAT WE CAN MOVE IN THE SAME DIRECTION TOWARD THE SAME GOAL.

A Definition of Mission

Everything we do in ministry together is valid only to the extent that it helps us close the gap. This unified direction in response to our vision is our mission.

KEY PRINCIPLE: VISION CALLS US TO MISSION.

Instead of doing church activities because "someone has to do it," we choose those activities that have the greatest likelihood of helping people become *whole and fully alive*.

KEY PRINCIPLE: ULTIMATELY, MISSION IS ACTION TO CLOSE THE GAP.



From Vision to Mission

How does vision translate into mission? In Jesus' ministry we are able to observe the ultimate model of how vision translates into mission. Let's consider again a key event in Jesus' life wherein he makes a definitive statement about his life and ministry.

Our Ultimate Model

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The
eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them,
"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." — Luke 4:16-21*

REFLECT

- ❑ *Why does this passage summarize Jesus' understanding of his mission?*
- ❑ *How does this statement demonstrate intentionality?*
- ❑ *What was the nature of Jesus' task?*

Lines from Isaiah 6 provide the mission statement for Jesus' ministry. How did that vision translate into action? In other words, what did Jesus do to close the gap?

Consider two examples.

Jesus Heals a Physical Infirmary

It is the nature of the kingdom of God for life to break in where death prevails.

One day, while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting near by (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal.

Just then some men came, carrying a paralyzed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus.

When he saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you."

Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, "Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the one who was paralyzed—"I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home."

Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God. Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen strange things today." — Luke 5: 17-26

REFLECT

- What is the main point of this story? Is it the healing?*
- What was really robbing the man of his vitality? Was it the fact that he couldn't walk?*
- Describe the what is and what ought to be in this account.*
- How did Jesus' action close the gap?*

Jesus Heals a Heart

Another example of Jesus' mission at work is found in the story that immediately follows the healing of the lame man. Again, we see the power of God breaking the power of death and bringing forth life in its place.

After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up, left everything, and followed him.

Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others sitting at the table with them. The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

Jesus answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance." — Luke 5: 27-32

- ❑ *Describe the what is and what ought to be in this account.*
- ❑ *How did Jesus' action close the gap?*
- ❑ *What makes these two accounts examples of intentional mission?*

KEY PRINCIPLE: BY CHOOSING LEVI, JESUS DEMONSTRATED THAT HIS MISSION WAS ABOUT BRINGING LIFE OUT OF DEATH, EVEN THE DEATH THAT HOLDS UNDISPUTED SINNERS CAPTIVE.

Our Mission: Close the Gap

Both of these biblical examples demonstrate the fundamental principle of mission and the role of the church in the world.

KEY PRINCIPLE: OUR ACTIONS AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S CHURCH MUST AIM AT CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN WHAT IS AND WHAT OUGHT TO BE IN SOME REAL AND SUBSTANTIAL WAY.

- ❑ *What does this effort look like in your daily experience?*
- ❑ *What has this kind of closing-the-gap activity looked like in the ministries of your church?*

Until Jesus returns, we, the Church of Jesus Christ, are to be about closing the gap between what is and what ought to be. Our mission is to work where we must, believing that through our efforts God is bringing life out of death.

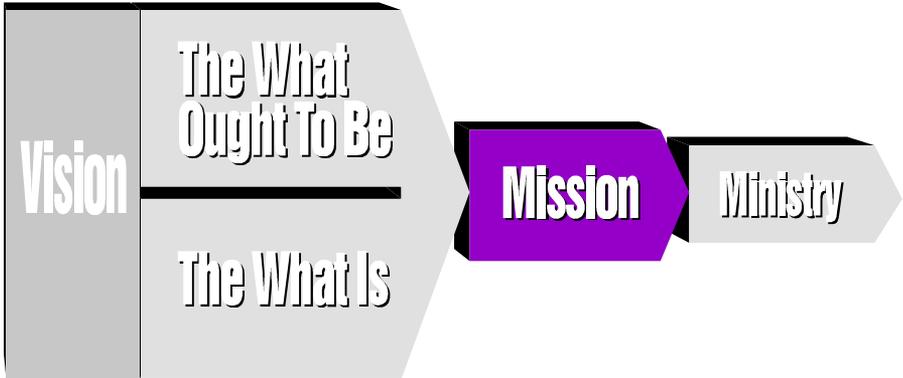
Summary

What have you learned in this session?

We have considered the relationship of vision to mission. In the next study, you will begin to visualize your church's mission. To do so, you will build upon the earlier discussion of how the gap manifests itself in your community.

Visualizing Our Mission

Session Five



Vision aligns your mission efforts by clarifying where you should go and why. The where and the why is your mission.

Mission is the action to close the gap between what is and what ought to be.

In this study you will begin to visualize your mission in light of your mission context. Put another way, you are going to define your mission relative to the way the gap manifests itself in your community.

A clear sense of mission is able to address four questions.

- What are your strengths and how should you use them for God's kingdom in your mission context?*
- What are you supposed to do and why are you supposed to do it?*
- For whom are you do it?*
- How are you going to accomplish it?*

Although these four questions are phrased in definitive language, some interim wrestling must occur before you can answer them definitively. So for our discussion, you will rephrase them.

- Do you have a strength in this area?*
- In light of your current mission context, what could you do and why would you feel this is important?*
- For whom would you do it?*
- How could you accomplish it? In other words, what are some practical ways you could address the gap?*

Visualizing Mission Opportunities

Using what you have discovered so far, begin to visualize your mission by completing the table below.

An Example

NOW	<i>Do we have a strength in this area?</i>	<i>What could we do?</i>	<i>For whom would we do it?</i>	<i>How could we accomplish it?</i>	THEN
Adequate food and affordable housing are not available for everyone.	We have accessible facilities.	Commit to making sure basic resources are available.	Anyone in our community who is in need.	Open soup kitchen. Support temporary housing agencies in our community. Conduct food drives. Adopt families in need.	Everyone in our community has enough food and housing they can afford.

Recreate this Table

**Visualizing
Your Mission
- Part One**

NOW	Do we have a strength in this area?	What could we do?	For whom would we do it?	How could we accomplish it?	THEN

Summary

What have you accomplished in this session?

Many churches have much invested in existing structures and traditions. While traditions are part of every church's identity and must be celebrated for the role they have played, some traditions become barriers to faithfulness in mission. To the extent that such barriers exist, they threaten the viability of a church's future ministry. In the next session, you will look at how tradition can become a barrier to mission and how the early church addressed this issue when it arose.

Bring Down the Barriers

Session Six



Your mission is to close the gap between what is and what ought to be in some real and meaningful way. This mission is based on the vision you feel God has given you for your church. To do so, you must engage the people in your community and congregation. Yet many unchurched find great barriers between them and the life of the church.

When God Is Behind Change

In the early years, Antioch (in Syria) became the second major church. It was in Antioch that believers were first called "Christians." It was from Antioch that Paul and Barnabas were sent on their first missionary journey. As a result of their success among the Gentiles, a controversy arose over the status of these Gentile converts and what was expected of them: Under what terms would they be admitted into the full life of the church?³

A group within the church was known as Judaizers. These people insisted that the new Gentile converts must keep the entire "law of

³Martin, Ralph, *New Testament Foundations, Vol. 2, Eerdmans, p. 110*

Moses" which, by this time, included many customs that were part of Palestinian Judaism. But the centerpiece of their contention was the rite of circumcision. The Judaizers believed that the Gentiles must become good Jews before they could be accorded full Christian status.

The Issue

Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders. So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, "It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses." — Acts 15: 1-5

In order to respond to the issue, the early church convened the first church council. Peter spoke first.

Peter's Response: Be careful what you resist!

The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither your ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will." The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles. — Acts 15: 6-12

REFLECT

- ❑ What points does Peter make?

Peter then asks why they are putting God to the test.

- ❑ *Why is the Jewish believers' attitude toward the Gentiles a case of "testing God"?*

KEY PRINCIPLE: GOD DEMONSTRATES THAT HIS DIVINE INTENTIONS ARE NOT CONSTRAINED BY HUMAN TRADITIONS.

Resistance to change is not a new problem. It seems to be a human trait.

- ❑ *How was resistance to change operative in the early church?*
- ❑ *What was the early church afraid would happen?*
- ❑ *How likely is your congregation to resist change? Explain.*

Separating Essentials from Equivocalities

One of the ways we resist change is by failing to separate what in our traditions is essential and what is not. The first church council looked at exactly this issue.

After they finished speaking, James replied, "My brothers, listen to me. Simeon (i.e. Peter) has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name. This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written, 'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called.

Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things known from long ago.' Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood.

— Acts 15:13-20

James boldly declared, "Do not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to the Lord." His message is that we should not allow our traditions to stand in the way of people coming to faith and finding a place among us.

KEY PRINCIPLE: WE SHOULD NOT IMPOSE OUR CULTURAL PREFERENCES AND TRADITIONS ON OTHERS IN ORDER TO FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE HAVING THEM AMONG US.

REFLECT

- Do you think you have any traditions, which stand in the way of reaching or serving your community?*
- What are they?*

You can turn to the Context Report to gain some insight on this question.

- Scan "Part 3: The Comparison" for points of divergence that may help you determine how your traditions may be functioning as barriers.*
- Scan "Part 5: Program Preferences" for points of divergence that may help you determine how your traditions may be functioning as barriers.*

Note: These sections of the Context Report are not the only source of information available. They simply serve as discussion starters as you address the issue of barriers.

You must consider to what extent you in any way impose your cultural preferences for your own comfort. Explaining the council's decision in a letter to the Gentile Christians, James states for us what exactly we should consider.

*We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these **ESSENTIALS**: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell." — Acts 15:27-29*

In summary, the message from the elders of Jerusalem was "Leave these Gentile converts alone. Do not impose your traditions on them. Clearly God is at work among them. It would be unwise to get in the way."

The council did place some conditions on the Gentile believers. We do not fully understand these particular conditions, but James considers them "essential." The other issues, although of such great import to the Judaizers, are not considered essential. James gave the Gentile believers some form, but otherwise they were free from the Jewish traditions.

REFLECT

In light of Acts 15, you need to ask yourself some difficult questions.

- As you look out over your community and beyond, where and how do you see God working?*
- What can you say about this working? What situations, if any, are analogous to what you read about in Acts 15?*

As you think about your church....

- What is essential?*
- What is equivocal?*
- What is expendable?*

Use the blank table on the following page as a worksheet to consider these questions. Fill in the spaces with your responses.

<i>Essential</i>	<i>Equivocal</i>	<i>Expendable</i>
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Images and Symbols

Beliefs and Values

Style

- If each of these were addressed appropriately, how would your church's ministry be different?*

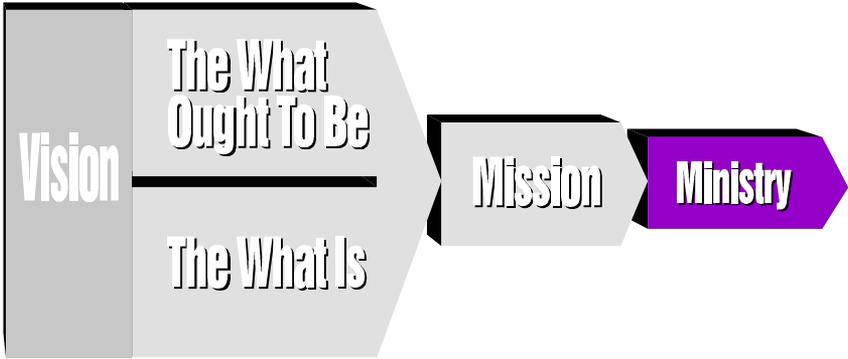
Summary

Summarize what you have learned in this study. How will this study make a difference in your view of what your church should do?

In the next session, you will turn your attention toward the central concern of mission. As you consider what you should be doing for God's kingdom, you will see how vision, mission and ministry tie together.

Keeping the Main Thing, the Main Thing

Session Seven



The ultimate hope of your vision is people who are whole and fully alive, and this hope calls us to respond. Put differently, the gap between what is and what ought to be calls us to mission. Mission is translated into those things you do individually and collectively to close the gap in some substantial way. We call these activities—the things we do to close the gap—“ministry” and/or “programs.” We know that in this world our efforts will always be incomplete, but in God’s power we can have a very real and significant impact for his kingdom.

If people who are whole and fully alive is your vision, what do you hope to be the end of your particular efforts in ministry? The question sounds circular. Wouldn't you hope that the end of your efforts in ministry would be people who are whole and fully alive? Yes, but when you consider the outcome of your ministries, the interim result will also be people who are increasingly more whole and alive.

In this session, you will see how the ReVisioning process works within the context of a local church's ministry. You will see how;

- ❑ *Mission defines your ministry activities and*
- ❑ *Proper ministry activities begin to close the gap.*

The Mission Mandate

We take our lead again from the apostle Paul. He provides us with a wonderfully integrated statement that links vision (what ought to be) together with mission (God's commission), ministry (what Paul did) and the outcome of his ministry (what the people will become).

I became its [i.e. the Church's] servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me. — Colossians 1: 25-29

REFLECT

- ❑ *How does Paul describe himself in the opening words of the passage we looked at? Why was he in this role?*
- ❑ *What does it mean to "commission" someone?*
- ❑ *What did God commission Paul to do?*
- ❑ *What do you think Paul means by the phrase "to make the word of God fully known, the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints"?*

Paul's mission was "to make the word of God fully known," and this mission was driven by his vision of the end of his efforts. Let's unpack these verses further.

The Vision - The Hope of Glory

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. — Colossians 1:27

Paul tells us that the mystery he is making known is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Now this is a very significant and powerful statement—but how many of us really know what it means?

REFLECT

- ❑ *What do you think "the hope of glory" refers to?*

- ❑ *What does "the hope of glory" have to do with the hope of being whole and fully alive?*

In Colossians, Paul explains his apostleship among the Gentiles. God had chosen him to make known the great mystery to them, namely "Christ in you, the hope of glory." That notion is the core of our hope. For we shall not only be with Christ, but we shall be like Christ—not in his divinity but in his full humanity, humanity as it ought to be.

On that day we shall finally be whole and fully alive; each of us will finally be our real self. On that day our real person will emerge complete and whole, free of brokenness and pain. Free of fears and anxieties. Free of futile labor and senseless endeavors. It is for this end that Christ died. It is for this end that the Spirit works in those of us who believe each day. We look forward to the day when we shall see Christ and be fully with him in the presence of God. But we can not yet be fully in God's presence, for we are not our true selves. To see the face of God now would destroy us (c.f. Exodus 33:20). But

when we are finally what God intends and what we long in our heart to be, we shall see God face to face.⁴

It was this vision, this hope that compelled Paul and defined his mission. But what exactly did he do? This is the question of ministry.

The Ministry

It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom ... – Colossians 1:28

Paul's ministry had a single focus—sharing the mystery of "Christ in you"—which he carried out primarily through two activities—warning and teaching.

We Proclaim Christ

REFLECT

- ❑ *What does it mean to you to "proclaim Christ"?*

- ❑ *In what ways is Christ proclaimed among us?*

- ❑ *How do we make the proclamation of Christ real to your community? Does your community hear or see the proclamation of Christ?*

KEY PRINCIPLE: THE CENTERPIECE OF EVERYTHING THE CHURCH DOES MUST BE THE PROCLAMATION OF CHRIST. VIS-À-VIS THIS, NOTHING ELSE MATTERS!

Warning and Teaching Everyone

Paul insists that the proclamation of Christ was the main focus of all that he did. Warning and teaching were the two primary means.

⁴*This concept is powerfully portrayed in story form by C.S. Lewis in his book, Till We Have Faces.*

- ❑ What is meant by “warning”?

- ❑ What would Paul have taught?

Warning and teaching mean more than just passing on knowledge (teaching) or issuing challenges (warning).

- ❑ Who has been the most influential teacher of spiritual matters in your life? Why was this person so influential?

- ❑ When, if ever, has someone “warned” you about something? Was it a positive warning in the sense that you knew the person shared out of genuine love and concern for you? What was the result of you hearing the warning?

KEY PRINCIPLE: CARING FOR OTHERS TRANSLATES INTO TEACHING AND WARNING THEM THAT WHAT THEY REALLY LONG FOR IS IN CHRIST AND CHRIST ALONE.

The Goal: Maturity

Notice that we have come full circle. The hope of glory was at the heart of Paul’s vision. God commissioned him to be the apostle to the Gentiles and made him responsible for proclaiming Christ to the world. Consequently, Paul’s primary ministry activities were warning and teaching. But toward what end?

*(S)o that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me —
Colossians 1:29*

REFLECT

- ❑ What do you think Paul means by “mature in Christ”?

Paul speaks of standing in the presence of God and offering the people to whom he has proclaimed Christ. And what kind of offering does a person make to God? Presumably the best offering imaginable, one as perfect as possible. Paul therefore wants to present people complete and, in every way, whole; the people whom he has warned and taught. The people who have become mature. At that moment the gap between what is and what ought to be will finally and fully close.

KEY PRINCIPLE: OUR DESIRE MUST BE TO PRESENT ONE ANOTHER TO GOD WHOLE AND FULLY ALIVE.

Focusing on the prospect of the people's full perfection in Christ on the last day, Paul expends all his energies in the exercise of his ministry. His apostolic tasks were not completed with the conversion of men and women (justification). This was only the beginning, and the end would not be reached until the day of Christ when the quality of Paul's ministry would be tested.⁵

- ❑ *Imagine standing before God. What would you present to him?*

- ❑ *How important is it to you that, as a product of your life's work, you are able to present to God people whose lives and faith were touched by your ministry?*

- ❑ *Does this seem like a strange idea to you? Why or why not?*

⁵O'Brien, Peter T., *Word Biblical Commentary, Colossians, Philemon, Vol. 44*, Word Publishing, 1982. p. 90

And so Paul poured all his energy into proclaiming Christ. The vision of what will be was so inspirational that he could do nothing else. Allow yourself to imagine the day when God completes what has been started. Imagine the church of Jesus Christ complete and revealed in its full glory. Imagine yourself whole and fully alive. Does the thought cause a surging within your soul?

Summary

For several weeks, we have been working through the ReVision Planning Model. You have moved from Vision to Mission to Ministry and Program. In reality, however, the movement flows in the other direction as well. Paul has shown us this in Colossians. As he, a “servant of the gospel,” gave himself in ministry to others, those people became more mature, more whole and alive. What ought to be began to be what is. The gap began to close!

A Question

Session Eight

At the close of our last session, you had completed the movement from Vision to Mission to Ministry and Program. Now, in this final session, you will start with a question. Response to this question will determine the direction of your church in a way no other single question will. Spend significant time reflecting upon it.

A Story

A church was in the process of building a new sanctuary. It was actually the third attempt. Two previous times, it had started the process, hired an architect to develop the initial design concepts, and then shut down the process. Lack of support, changing staff and other issues caused the project to be postponed. Prior to its third try, this church decided to do some research. It wanted to do a better job of reaching its community and knew that a building played a key role in that effort.

So the church hired a firm to conduct focus groups with people from their community. In each focus group, participants were shown the architectural renderings of the two previous efforts. While finding one at least intriguing, neither would attract them to attend. The reason? They were not inviting and seemed cold. A great deal of thought had gone into those earlier designs. They were to provoke a sense of worship and awe. That they did, but the community felt excluded by the external design.

A building committee was formed for this third try at building a sanctuary. Committee members started the process loaded with the information from the focus groups. As they began the design process, they started talking about the features they wanted. After all, few people ever get to design a church building and those who do will probably only do it once. So the pressure to build the church you want is great.

As the discussion continued, one individual in the group began to feel uncomfortable. He realized that many of the design ideas that were generating enthusiasm were contrary to what the community had told them. Finally, one evening he spoke up. This is what he said.

“As I listen to our discussion, I am troubled. We are sharing many wonderful ideas that will translate into a beautiful church sanctuary that most of us will love. But the concepts are contrary to what the community told us.

“We need to make a decision. Are we going to build a church for us, that we will love even though the community may not? Or are we going to build a church for others? If we build a church for us, we may be the only ones to enjoy it. But if we build a church for others, I doubt we will be disappointed.”⁶

The Question

REFLECT

This story sets before you an important question to consider as you think about the vision of your church for the 21st century. This is the question:

- ❑ *Are you envisioning a church for yourself, or are you envisioning a church for others?*

Spend some time on this. Write your thoughts. Avoid simply dismissing it because it forces an arbitrary either/or upon you. Assume, for the sake of reflection, that it must be one way or the other.

⁶ *The committee agreed that building a church for others was their primary task. Because of that decision, they guided the design of a sanctuary that captured the essential findings from the community study as well as their own core theological beliefs. As of writing this study (fall 1995), the walls are just now going up. The church is Irvine Presbyterian Church, Irvine, California.*

