

My Love-Hate Relationship with Church Vision

For over 20 years, I have been a big advocate of the need for churches and ministries to get clear about the vision that God is leading them to. I still think that a clear, shared, compelling vision is important and powerful, and yet ...

I have seen many churches with wonderful vision statements and no forward momentum. I have talked to pastors and laypeople who are jaded about visions and visioning processes. What's the problem? Isn't a vision supposed to supply the direction and energy that lead to positive results? Here are four common vision-related diseases that afflict many churches and ministries:

- **It's not their vision.** Vision statements may not seem unique, but the meaning behind them should be specific to the church and its context. If a congregation decides to copy someone else's vision, they are unlikely to see much impact. Likewise, if the core leadership team doesn't have a high level of ownership in the vision, it will lack traction. There are a variety of ways to achieve this, but there are no shortcuts to creating a meaningful vision with high commitment.
- **It's not God's vision.** The church belongs to God, not us, so we should be seeking the owner's guidance as we make decisions. Asking where God is leading is essential. This is much more than a perfunctory prayer at the start of each meeting. It's a process that is done by spiritually mature leaders who will commit substantial time to listen for God's voice with the outcome being that, "It seemed right to the Holy Spirit and us ..." (Acts 15:28).
- **No hard choices are made.** The power of a real vision is that it declares a church's priorities. By implication, it also declares those things that are NOT priorities. Unfortunately, many visions (and the processes by which they are developed) suffer from a bad case of peacekeeping and accommodation. When leaders approach the point of making hard trade-offs that will disappoint or alienate someone, they often pull back. The result is a lack of focus and clarity that robs the ministry of the anticipated benefits.
- **The next steps are missing.** Visionary leaders are generally not known for their execution ability. Even if the visioning process has avoided the previous three ailments, someone needs to make the transition from a high-level, inspirational vision to concrete plans. Without this, people will wait and wonder what they are supposed to do.

I'm not the only person who has these mixed feelings about visions. I will close with one of my favorite quotes from one of America's truly visionary pastors. "Visions excite people. They inspire people. They compel people into action. But unless people eventually see progress toward the fulfillment of the vision they will conclude that the vision caster is just a dreamer blowing smoke, and their morale will plummet" (Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*). What's the health of your vision?

Read more from Mike [here](#).