

Things I've learnt from Nehemiah

1. A vision begins as a concern and must be allowed to grow
2. Pray for opportunities and plan as if you expect God to answer your prayers.
3. Act on your faith
4. Investigate before you initiate
5. Communicate the vision as a solution to a problem and to the right people at the right time
6. Respond to opposition by prayer, remembering and revising plans if necessary.
7. Don't underestimate the importance of alignment
8. Don't get distracted, stick to your values
9. Be confident in your God-given authority
10. Train up others to continue

Building Block #1 – A vision begins as a concern and must be allowed to grow

A God ordained vision will begin as a concern. You will hear or see something that gets your attention. Something will bother you about the way things are or the way things are headed.

Unlike many passing concerns, this will stick with you.
You will find yourself thinking about them in your free time.
You may lose sleep over them.
You won't be able to let them go because they won't let you go.

Nehemiah's concern over the condition of Jerusalem consumed him. It broke his heart. Thoughts of what was, as opposed to what could be brought tears to his eyes. This was not just a casual concern...it was a vision in the making.

What breaks your heart?
What are you concerned about?

Work colleagues, neighbours, families, couples, singles, youth, children.

He prayed and waited

A lot of people have good ideas. Many times God may be in the process of birthing a vision in their hearts. But most of the time, they want to start NOW!

But the story of Nehemiah, along with numerous other Biblical accounts, illustrates the truth that a clear vision does not necessarily indicate a green light to begin. Too often when a person with an idea that seems to be a God ordained vision charges out of the gates too early, the result is failure, discouragement and disillusionment.

A vision rarely requires immediate action. But it always requires patience.

So why wait? Why not just plunge ahead?

Because developing and discovering a vision is a process. Sometimes it's painful and agonizing. But it is always worth every bit of the agony along the way.

Waiting often seems like a waste of time. The assumption is, since we aren't moving ahead, nothing's going on. But that is not the case at all. Some important things are taking place while we wait.

A. The vision matures in us

Waiting gives us a chance to examine our emotions and sort out minor concerns from major ones. If what concerned you yesterday is of little concern today, odds are that it was not vision material.

Just as you cannot rush the development of a child in the womb, you cannot rush the development of a vision. God determines the schedule for both

B. We mature in preparation for the vision

C. God is at work behind the scenes preparing the way.

Questions:

1. In the following areas, how do you think life ought to be, what is your preferred option? Write a sentence to explain what your vision is for each area.

- Career _____
- Finances _____
- Spouse _____
- Children _____
- Church _____

2. What grips you? What concerns you? How does this burden connect with what God is up to in Coventry? How might you get involved? What could your response be?

Building Block #2 Pray for opportunities and plan as if you expect God to answer your prayers.

Prayer keeps the burden fresh
Prayer keeps the concern alive
Prayer keeps us looking for what God is doing.
Prayer keeps us expectant.
Prayer keeps us responsive to God
Prayer keeps us sensitive to the needs of others
Prayer helps us to not miss God-given opportunities.

Ne 1:11

Do we pray for a miracle or pray for an opportunity?

Our children don't miraculously become men and women of character and integrity. We have a role, we have opportunity after opportunity to build integrity and character into their lives. God involves us in what he is doing.

For friends who don;t know Jesus, we pray for opportunities to share Jesus with them.

Nehemiah prayed that the king would feel compassion. The burden Nehemiah shared with the king, ignited passion and concern in the king for the plight of Nehemiah's home city.

When the king asked Nehemiah needed. Nehemiah knew exactly what to ask for. He had a strategy.

Nehemiah had a vision, not just some dream, he had thought things through. He knew what to say when the opportunity arose.

Are we ready to respond to God given opportunities?

Plan

1. What opportunities do you need to pray for
2. Who are the people you could work with to accomplish your vision?
3. Write a simple plan to begin making your vision a reality.

Building Block #3 Act on your faith

Make the most of your current position. What are you learning now that would help you see your vision become a reality

What are you finding most difficult about your current situation?

The how is often the main problem for us, how is not a problem for God. What he originate , he orchestrates.

How do you respond to problems?

Faith - an expression of your confidence in the person and character of God.

“Acting on your faith is the ultimate expression of devotion, admiration, and adoration. Acting on your faith demonstrates that you believe God is who he says he is, and he will do what he has promised to do.” Andy Stanly p63, visioneering

By faith, the 'heroes' of the bible, responded to God's promises.

Noah
Abraham
Moses
Joshua
Gideon
David
Nehemiah

Are you willing to take God at his word. To wait, to trust, to believe, to pray, to persevere, to plan.

The king granted the request... because the good hand of my God was on me (N 2:8)

Vision

Attempt something so impossible that unless God is in it, it's doomed to failure. -John Haggai

Do you trust God to catch you when you jump?

Building Block #4 Investigate before you initiate

Nehemiah explored the walls before he went public with what he was planning to do.

He walks around the city at night, inspecting the state of the walls. He writes (Neh 2:13-16)

By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work. (Nehemiah 2:13-16)

Before speaking to anyone, he' gathers information. He's travelled about 1000 miles, stopping along the way to cut down trees for timber. When he gets there, he leaves the men and the equipment at at night, secretly explores the walls. He wants to see for himself the scale of the problem.

Look around

Explore

Ask questions, ask more questions

Experiment

Volunteer

Investigating your visions will

1. Confirm that God is in it

2. Give it further definition and focus

3. Help you realise that it was simply a good idea, not a 'God ' idea

During this phase, make sure you can articulate the 'whys?' and 'hows?'

Why does Coventry need another church?

Why should we plant a vineyard church?

How should we plant?

How will we gather people?

How will we build and

Why should we move to a new venue?

Get the facts

Get a grip on reality

People need to know that you have investigated the new terrain, you need to know what you are leading people into.

1. Don't commit simply because of your passion, compassion or emotions.
 - a. Is there someone you should talk to?
 - b. Are there books you can read?
 - c. Is there a location you should visit?
2. There are three things that keep people from fully investigating their visions
 - Impatience - I don't have time. I know what the problem is. I have to act now.
 - Pride - I know what to do? What can I learn from taking time to investigate?
 - Fear - I'm afraid that if I see how bad things really are, I'll be discouraged.

Building Block #5 Communicate the vision as a solution to a problem and to the right people at the right time

Nehemiah communicated the vision carefully to the people.

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace."

Painting a picture is a key part of communicating the vision.

This is how things could be.

He makes it plain. Look we're in a mess. The city is in ruins. Look at the state we are in. The trouble we are in. We're a disgrace. An embarrassment. The people of God, living in the city of God. Let us rebuild. Why should we? Why bother, we'll get round to it at some point. Were they used to the situation? Why now?

1. What's the problem?
2. What's the solution?
3. Why should we do something?
4. Why should we do something now?

Visioncasting always includes an element of waking people out of their apathy!

The vision must communicate what could and should be.

What problem does the vision propose to solve?
What might or might not happen if things don't change?
What can you imagine the solution will look like?

Why should we attempt this?
Why bother?
Why? Why? Why?

Repeatedly asking why, moves the conversation from the realm of circumstance to one focused on values.

The fact that something needs to be done is not enough. People give what they feel they can afford to meet a need. But they will give sacrificially toward a vision that bears the marks of God's involvement. There will always be needs, the list is endless. But when an opportunity comes along to invest our time and resources in something God is up to, it is amazing how much more of our time and treasure we are willing to invest. A Stanley

How can I respond?

How can I give my life to it?

Questions

1. Why must I see this vision through to the end

- What difference will it make?
- What is there to gain?
- What is there to lose
- What's at stake?
- Why should I attempt this?

2. Why must it be done now?

- What do I stand to lose by waiting?
- What evidence have I seen that God is involved?

Building Block #6 Respond to opposition by prayer, remembering and revising plans if necessary.

Any vision worth pursuing will demand sacrifice and risk.

To step out, is to risk and to sacrifice.

They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work. [N2:18]

The people committed themselves

The people committed their time, talent, and treasure for an unspecified length of time to complete the task. And when they did, something unexpected happened. This disorganized, unmotivated, nationally uninspired remnant became a team. The moment they put their hands to the task they were transformed from a scattered self serving flock into an army with a mission. A. Stanley

We lead by example

We give by example

We commit by example

Visions are easy to criticise

Visions attract criticism

Visions are difficult to defend against criticism

Visions often die at the hands of the critics.

Whenever we attempt to change something it plays on the insecurities of those who have grown accustomed to the way things are.

To change is to challenge

There will always be gaps in the vision.
There will always be unknowns

Is the vision worth defending, is what God has called you to do, worth fighting for.

Pray

Remember

Revise

Nehemiah walked by faith but also lead strategically.
He stayed true to the vision, but changed his plans to achieve the vision.

A vision is what could and should be
A plan is a guess as to the best way to accomplish the vision.

This guess may be educated, informed, prayerfully considered, experience laden, but it's still a guess.

Visions are refined, they don't change
Plans are revised, they rarely stay the same.

Be stubborn about the visions, be flexible with your plan.

Don't be afraid to learn from your critics. They may see something that you haven't.

Questions

1. When your vision is criticized, what is your normal response?
2. What are the primary criticisms brought against your vision?
3. Which of these criticisms do you consider valid?
4. Do you need to revise your plans? If so, how?
5. How have others been affected by criticism?
6. How can you reassure those you lead?

Building Block #7 Don't underestimate the importance of alignment

If you take your hands off your car's steering wheel, you will notice it pulls to one side or the other. In order for a car to move forward in the right direction, many different parts have to be in alignment. If misalignment is not addressed, the car may have to experience major repairs, may break down or crash.

Two causes of misalignment:

Time - over time, normal wear and tear will begin to affect the alignment. [N 5:3]

P165-166 of Visioneering

Regardless of how effectively you cast your vision initially, eventually a team member or two will work (their) way out of alignment. (They) will develop an agenda that is off-centre to the vision. Instead of working with the rest of your team, [they] will be pulling ever so slightly in a different direction. This usually transpires well into the implementation stage of a vision.

Worse yet, someone may develop a competing agenda. Instead of a slight pull, [they] may be pulling directly against you. When a team loses its alignment, it is far less efficient. More energy is expended and less progress is made. There is extra wear and tear on team members. It makes for an unpleasant ride. And the longer you ignore the problem, the more costly it becomes.

Like an automobile, if the situation goes unchecked, eventually there will be a breakdown. What begins as a slight irritation can develop into an expensive problem. Team members who are out of alignment can bring the progress of a family or organization to a screeching halt. -A Stanley

Time - gradually you find that your values change.

Bumps - Crises will occur, but rather than focusing on crisis management, attention should be spent on pursuing the vision of what has God you to.

Illustration of marriage - expectation before marriage.

Visions thrive in an environment of unity.

How to recognise the problem of misalignment:

1. Someone attempts to control rather than serve
2. They may manipulate people and circumstances to further their own agendas
3. They may exhibit an unwillingness to resolve their differences face to face. Gossip rather than confrontation.
4. They may become suspicious of others
5. They see other people's failures as their own personal successes.

How to take action:

Lead, don't control

Be a man or woman of integrity

Resolve your differences face to face

Believe the best about other team members.

Questions:

1. Are there alignment issues among your team members that need to be addressed?

2. What is preventing you from addressing the issue?
3. What is the worst thing that could happen as a result of a confrontation?
4. How does the misalignment affect the overall vision?
5. How might the vision be negatively affected if the alignment issue is not addressed?
6. How has your leadership or behaviour contributed to the alignment problems?
7. What steps do you need to take to address your contribution to the problem?

Building Block #8 Don't get distracted, stick to your values

Influence others

Moral authority - don't let your completion of the vision come at the expense of your moral authority.

Character and integrity

I am doing a great work and cannot come down.

Distracted by other opportunities

Distracted by opposition

Distracted by fear

Don't let good opportunities, opposition or fear derail your pursuit of the vision.

How are you investing your time and energy?

What opportunities consistently distract you from your vision and what do you plan to do about it?

How do you respond when people criticize you?

Within the context of your vision, what is your greatest fear?

Building Block #9 Be confident in your God-given authority

Nehemiah knew that God had called him to lead the people.

Nehemiah is called away, back to the palace in Persia. In his absence things start to break down.

His presence in the city was a major influence on the health of the city. Without him, the spiritual and social climate deteriorated.

Those serving in the temple, were not given their allotted food, [13:10]

They worked to give their families food,

With the priests away from the temple, respect for the sabbath began to lapse

The sabbath became just another workday.

The people start to forget what God had done.

Nehemiah returns, he realises that things were starting to break down. First the sabbath, then marriages and families would be affected.

He acts boldly:

He threatens the merchants

He beats up those who had married outside the faith. [25-27]

Bold leadership must be vision based.
V 17-18

Negelecting the sabbath was key part to the demise of Jerusalem in the first place.
The Jews flirtations with other faiths was another key reason for the breakdown in the relationship between them and God.

Bold action must be carried out against a backdrop of clearly defined beliefs and behaviours.

Nehemiah was introducing anything new, he was calling people back to the reasons they existed in the first place. To be a light of the nations.

He led the city in reforms

When Jesus entered the temple, he behaved similarly.

Jesus' actions are rooted in the Father's vision for the temple.

Being nice doesn't always do the job. Waiting for people to change doesn't always work, sometimes people need some bold encouragement.

With love and mercy be strong and courageous.
Be confident to make the choices that will protect the vision that God has called you to.

Building Block #10 Train up others to continue the work you've started

30 So I purified the priests and the Levites of everything foreign, and assigned them duties, each to his own task. 31 I also made provision for contributions of wood at designated times, and for the firstfruits.

Remember me with favor, O my God.