**Where Are We Going and**

**How Do We Know When We Get There?**

**FBC Albemarle**

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The beginning of August can really mean just one thing…the start of NFL Training Camp! I know what you’re thinking…of course that was the answer! NFL players are enduring the summer heat in their pads and helmets to prepare for the long and grueling season. Why? Other than being paid handsomely for playing a game, they go through the pain and the sacrifice because they have a vision. They have a vision of holding the Lombardi Trophy around 10:00pm on Sunday, February 5, 2017. They envision being on the platform holding the trophy, confetti raining down all around them and celebrating like they have never celebrated before. Their vision of the future gives their present physical discomfort meaning and purpose.

That is what vision can do in our lives. It puts into perspective the present day struggles and gives purpose for our trials. Rather than wandering around aimlessly in life and avoiding obstacles, vision gives us purpose, direction and the intestinal fortitude to overcome the obstructions life has to offer.

The King James Version of Proverbs 29:18 states, “Where there is no vision, people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.” Not surprisingly, the KJV takes the more ominous translation than some of the more recent ones. The NIV states, “Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom’s instruction.” The NRSV states, “Where there is no prophecy, people cast off restraint, but happy are those who keep the law.” The general meaning behind this proverb is that without a vision of the future, a revelation of what we should be about or a prophecy of what is to come, we will wander aimlessly, lacking discipline and focus. “We will cast off restraint…” meaning, we will do whatever we want, however we want to do it.

The second part of this proverb says, “But happy are those who keep the law.” This makes sense if we put the Law of Moses into proper perspective. The Ten Commandments and the subsequent Jewish Laws that were put into place were to help the Israelites to have a right relationship with God and with one another. They were not given to God’s people to hinder them or burden them. Therefore, if they kept the Law, they were being disciplined and focused on what is right and good. The Law provided restraint, boundaries and disciplines to overcome the obstacles rather than avoiding them.

Back in the spring, the Strategic Planning Committee presented what I refer to as our Vision Plan. It is our revelation or the prophecy for us to heed. It provides the framework in which our church can grow spiritually while making an indelible mark on our community. The plan was not just some great ideas that the committee deemed interesting but rather, we feel like it was a prophetic word from God for our fellowship. Members of the committee spent time talking with leaders within the church and out in the community. The committee spent time praying and pondering over what God had in store for us. In midst of individuals reporting back to the larger committee, we heard the key words time and time again, as if God was trying to tell us something. We kept hearing words such as food, family and hospitality. So we pursued what God was trying to tell us and we tried to put it into words that would give us the boundaries or the rails to stay in between. We didn’t try to be fancy or even practical. We just followed God’s leading and this is where we ended up. (refer to Strategic Plan Document)

Sometimes we come up with our own plans and we ask God to bless them. If we are honest, that is what we mostly do in church. Thankfully, God knows our hearts and often blesses what we try to do in our own power. However, when the committee put this plan together, we had no preconceived notion of what it might look like. We didn’t have any of the answers. There are more questions than answers to be found. That is how I know this plan is of God and from God.

That is why this strategic plan doesn’t have specific action plans. It doesn’t have bullet points under each of the categories because we don’t know what should go there. That is why I refer to it as a living, breathing document. This Vision Plan provides the large umbrellas for our ministries and guidance to direct our attention but it doesn’t provide specific ways in which we might see God at work in and through our fellowship. We are charging our leadership, our ministries, our committees, our Sunday School classes and individuals to find ways to live into these three foci: food, family and hospitality. This is where we are headed.

The next question is “How do we know when we get there?” The answer is, “I don’t know.” I don’t know because I don’t know if there is an actual destination that we can get to and say that we have arrived…at least not on this side of heaven. I think we will get glimpses of that destination in midst of striving to live into the vision. As many times as we will fail, we will also experience success. We will see the joys of welcoming others through Christian hospitality. We will walk with families through life’s triumphs and through the valleys of shadow of death, having a clearer understanding of what it means to be a family of families together. We will learn how to have a healthy relationship with food in our lives even as we provide food for those who lack the necessities of life. I think our final destination is the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven and we are privileged to be called to participate in bringing that to fruition.

Since I don’t have any answers, maybe I can provide some suggestions on what it is going to take to bring our vision together to fruition. First, we will need some foresight. Foresight is like looking through a telescope. This outlook allows us to know what is ahead as it connects us to our future.

The Hubble Space Telescope is a space telescope that was launched into space in 1990. Because it is outside of the Earth’s atmosphere, The Hubble can take extremely high-resolution images. With these incredible high-resolution images, scientists have been able to refine the age of the universe to 13.7 billion years. It has also confirmed the high probability of black holes in nearby galaxies. If you have not seen some of the images Hubble Telescope has been able to send back to Earth, you need to Google them and witness how majestic and creative our God really is.

Just as The Hubble Telescope has been able to give us a different outlook on our past and future, so does seeing with foresight. We cannot just focus on our current situation and become myopic. We have to have one eye on the present and our other eye on the future of what God is calling us toward.

Second, we need to have insight. If foresight is like looking through a telescope, then insight is like looking through a microscope. This perception gives us an understanding of the present and helps us to dive deep into our true motivation.

It is widely known that the definition of insanity is continuing to do the same things while expecting different results. Without insight, that is what most of us do! We keep eating the same way and wonder why we are not losing weight. We keep staying up late watching TV and wonder why we are so tired all of the time. We continue to spend money we don’t have and wonder why we stay in debt. We keep doing the same things and expect things to change.

We need to continue to evaluate what we are doing as a church, how we are functioning and what results we are having. We need to check our motives and see why we do what we do. Individually, we need to discern our hearts to see how we might need to change for the better.

Third, we need to have some oversight. When I say oversight, I don’t mean we need have someone over us watching what we do. I mean that we need to climb a 100ft. in the air and see ourselves from a wider perspective. This will help us to understand where we are in respect to our community and culture.

Business and leadership expert Ronald Heifetz calls this “going to the balcony.” Heifetz suggest that without the capacity to get above the day-to-day action and seeing all of the moving parts at work, it is easy to get caught up in what we are doing. The focus then closes in on us and we fail to see how what we are doing is either making a difference for the people around us or simply making ourselves feel good.

There is one last thing that is required for us to live into our vision: courage! People often disguise their fear as wisdom when they enter into a supernatural mission that can only be accomplished with the help of God. Moses had this problem when he sent the twelve spies in to the Promised Land to determine where they should enter. Ten of the spies misunderstood their mission and somehow thought they were being asked whether or not they should take the land at all.

In order to achieve our vision, we will need to approach it with great courage, knowing that there will be some setbacks and failures. However, we have to have the courage try new things and new ways while relying on God who is in control. Too often the people of God have settled for what we could accomplish with our own strength and effort. If we truly believe that our vision is from God, we will have to rely on God to help us to achieve it! We have to have the foresight, insight and oversight but ultimately, we have to submit ourselves to the leadership of the Holy Spirit to do supernatural things through us. As Joshua declared to the people of Israel, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”