

The Essential Role of Vision-Casting in Movements

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KINGDOM KERNELS

AT THE END OF A FULL DAY of training in a remote house church in Asia, the breakthrough came. I had been sharing deeply from my heart about God’s heart for his kingdom to come fully to every lost community and people group. At the core of this vision was explaining the essence of a seed, just as Jesus used seeds in giving vision to His disciples of how the kingdom grows.

The challenge with my group was to convey to these rural believers the idea of kingdom multiplication. The concept that each disciple could bear fruit thirty, sixty and a hundred times, and then that the next generation of disciples they trained could do the same, just wasn’t sinking in. It was contrary to their discipleship paradigm.

The pastor’s 12-year-old son, soaking up every word, suddenly dashed out of the room. A few minutes later, he rushed back in holding a golden stalk of wheat in his hand. In front of the group, he presented it to me. “Brother Steve, this is what you mean! Each of these seeds will produce many more seeds which will produce many more seeds!”

In that same hour [Jesus] rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord

of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.” (Luke 10:21, ESV)

Aha’s spread across the room. We were finally on a path toward a kingdom movement. And now the group was ready for basic equipping and tools to walk that path. But only because the vision for kingdom multiplication was clear at last. The Father’s heart was now inspiring a new level of biblical faith. That stalk of wheat became a cherished possession for years to come.

As we launch disciples toward kingdom movements, vision is the key ingredient to turn them from the status quo to God’s agenda. In the early days with a new group of believers, I find myself spending a third or even half of every meeting just building in them faith for what is on God’s heart—His vision. One group that I trained for one year in church planting movement (CPM) strategies still wasn’t multiplying. A year later, as I was casting vision, the most fruitful person in the group exclaimed, “Oh! That’s what you mean!” Paradigms are hard to break, and vision-casting is

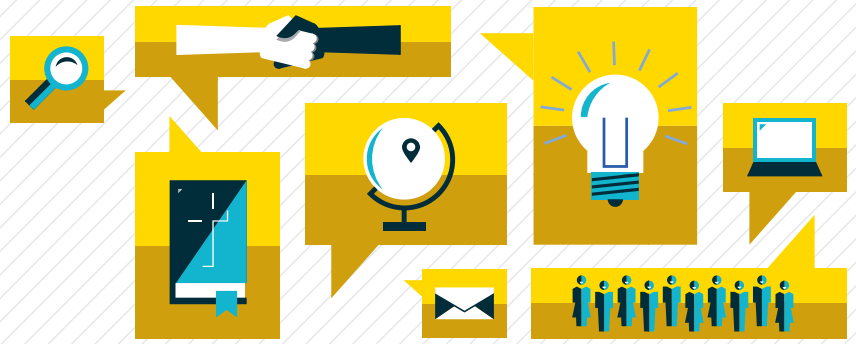
essential in that process.

The Most Misunderstood and Most Important Element of Multiplying Discipleship

Perhaps the most misunderstood element in a multiplying discipleship process is the role of casting vision on a regular basis. While it is the most misunderstood element, it is also the most important element for building a movement.

If I give a man a screwdriver and tell him to pound a nail into a board, he will quit in frustration. But if there is a million-dollar prize, he will find a way to pound that nail in with a screwdriver. It would be far better for me to give him a hammer. But he will find a way regardless because of the motivation of his heart.

In CPMs, a reproducing discipleship process is at the core of the equipping process, and vision-casting is at the center of it. We are giving disciples a vision of what God wants to do. We are changing their internal motivations. It is important for us to give them effective tools (e.g. the hammer). But if the vision is strong enough, they will find a way to follow God’s leading even with less effective tools.



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Scripture exhorts leaders to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:11-12), but often we only convey mechanics without actually giving them the *confidence* and competence to make disciples who can make disciples.

To address that, kingdom movements around the world often use variations of a three-thirds process in their weekly discipleship meetings. In the first third, disciples *look back* to evaluate how they did obeying God through 1) personal care, 2) worship/praise, 3) loving accountability and 4) vision-casting. In the middle third of their meeting, they will *look up* to ask God what He wants to speak to them through the 5) Word of God. In the final third, they will *look ahead* to determine how to obey God and how to make disciples who

can make disciples. To prepare for that, they will often 6) practice what they will share with those they train as well as 7) set goals based on what God told them and re-commission each other in prayer.

The element of the three-thirds process I am most often asked about is vision-casting. Because it is so misunderstood, it is the most poorly implemented element of the reproducing discipleship process. Its absence is perhaps the most common reason why discipleship groups and churches fail to multiply.

What Vision-Casting is Not

Frequently I am asked to observe a group to give feedback to the leader about their implementation of the three thirds. In one meeting, the leader led the group through a time of personal care, worship and accountability. The

meeting was limping along but then almost ground to a halt in terms of any momentum. The leader turned to a group member and said, “John, would you now read our vision statement?”

John read the group’s one-line vision statement in a monotone voice. Everyone nodded. That was it. With vision-casting checked off the list the leader moved on to the second third—Bible study.

I was stunned. No inspiring each other toward faith in what God wants to do. No passionate cries to hang in there. No encouragement to endure and press into the vision.

The meeting limped to its conclusion. In the feedback, I explained to the leader that what I had just observed was a sterile classroom experience, not

a meeting of the body of Christ. It was mere mechanics devoid of the powerful presence of the Spirit. It was not an interaction with God but following a form they felt would multiply.

- Vision-casting is not reciting a vision statement.
- Vision-casting is not a canned monologue that ignores that week's needs.
- Vision-casting is not a sterile enterprise that we can check off our list.
- Vision-casting is not pumping a group to do something that God does not want to do.

What Vision-Casting Is

Vision-casting is evaluating where a group is and then inspiring them toward faith in our Heavenly Father's heart.

It is not unlike a coach who speaks to his team at halftime. If they are losing, he inspires them to work together to win. If they are winning, he cautions them against slacking off. In the few minutes as the first half winds down and on the walk to the locker room, he is composing his thoughts to speak an apt word that will inspire his team to action.

To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is! (Prov. 15:23, ESV)

Vision-casting is giving an encouraging word to fellow disciples in a way that will remind them of God's heart to work in them and through them. It builds faith in them to act in alignment with how God is acting. It does not incite them to act in a way that is contrary to God and His Word.

Built around the Father's Heart

Vision-casting follows this progression:

1. What is **Father's heart** for this community, this group and this

person (the vision)?

2. Where is this group or person in terms of pursuing His heart?

- Is the vision of Father's heart clear?
- Are they discouraged?
- Are they confused?
- Do they lack faith?
- Are they over-confident or confident in their flesh?

3. What word can I share that will inspire them to align their current situation to God's heart?

The crux of this process is knowing our heavenly Father's heart. What is his vision for our community and our circle of relationships? How does He want to equip us and use us in this process? What is God's will, and how do I line up my life to it?

When we understand God's heart—His intentions—and then resolve to act based upon His heart, that is faith. Vision-casting is always about building biblical faith in those we disciple.

Apt for that Moment

As we understand God's heart, then we inspire those we train in a way that is apt for the moment. In times of discouragement, we encourage. When they are faithless, we impart faith. When they are myopic, we share big vision. When they are over-confident, we share a sobering word. When they are confused, we give clarity.

Before any meeting with a group or individual, I enter a prayerful preparation process. Though I might have planned to share a specific vision-casting element for that week, I stop to ask Father what encouraging word they need. Sometimes it is what I have planned. Sometimes the group needs to hear something different. Just as a coach anticipated

sharing a particular pep talk at halftime but changes it based on circumstances, so also we vary what we share depending on the needs of the week.

Bottom line, we ask: "What encouraging or inspiring word do they need this week? What will build vision in them?" If we meet with these disciples regularly, it doesn't have to be a long message—just five or ten minutes. And we encourage them to do the same thing with those they disciple.

Tool-Belt Built from Word, Works and Wineskins

Even so, many disciple-makers are at a loss for how to cast vision. Since we are trying to build faith in Father's heart, then we must find inspiring messages from places that line up with His heart. Here are the three most common sources:

- **Word of God:** God's heart is seen throughout Scripture. Comb the Word to find appropriate ways to help disciples align their attitudes and actions to what He says. Be careful to interpret the Word in context and to apply it as it was meant. Messages that do not exegete God's Word faithfully will not enable believers to follow God's heart but set them up for defeat.
- **Works of God:** The ways in which God has worked in history and around us today show us what He is like. Sharing short testimonies of what God has done or is doing can build faith in us that He is still at work in places like ours and in people like us.

Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who delight in them. (Ps. 111:2)

- **Wineskins:** Methods and models that flexibly cooperate with the work of the Spirit (Mt. 9:17)

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offer practical encouragement and pathways for us to follow. Hearing someone share a breakthrough of how he effectively shared the gospel with a post-modern can encourage us to do the same.

Each time we meet with a group of believers, we want to give them a five, or ten-minute inspiring word built from these sources. If it is the first time we meet with a group, we will spend much more time on the vision God has for them.

Helpful in this process is to build a tool-belt of short vision-casting messages. If you have ten to twenty of these in your tool-belt, you are ready in-season and out for a multitude of situations that will arise from week to week. Doubtless you will share others as you prepare each week, but these will keep you ready always. Keep them short, vivid and memorable. In this way, our fellow believers can call them to mind when they are discouraged and can share these words with others.

Spoken in Passionate Sincerity

The real question is whether we believe what we are sharing. Are we speaking these words with sincerity or do we appear as peddlers?

For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ. (2 Co. 2:17)

Paul is referring to sellers who would stack the good-looking fruit on top and put the sub-par fruit (which they would sell) underneath. Do we present a false picture of God's heart? Do we say one thing but believe another? Instead, we must inspire others because we are convinced that this is the nature of our Father. If so, then we must speak with passion, exhorting the group to believe and respond.

Vision for a Kingdom Movement

Sometimes, you are the only person

speaking into the lives of others that God wants to build a kingdom movement through them. Sometimes it is the vision you keep imparting that keeps them on the less-traveled path. The enemy is whispering in their ears, "Not here, not now and not through you!"

Your job is to speak the words of the Father to them. Soon you will be joined by others speaking similar messages until eventually we are surrounded by an army of faith.

It is your role to inspire them.

It is your role to build faith in them.

Perhaps no one else will. 