

THRIVAL MODE

USING THE POWER OF VISION TO IGNITE
YOUR PASSION FOR LIVING



MARK STEVEN MASON

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The Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, once wrote that God hates visionary dreaming as it makes the self-glorifying dreamer proud, pretentious, and miserable when the vision fails. However, Mark Mason encourages his readers to establish a God-glorifying vision, one not limited by the smallness of self but empowered by the bigness of the LORD. This vision, built upon kingdom ideals and fine-tuned by the leading of the Holy Spirit, will be about making a difference, and in that — one way or another — the reader will not just survive, but thrive.

— Father Jason Hess, Rector of St. Thomas Anglican Mission

God's plan for our lives doesn't have to be a seemingly unattainable idea that continues to slip through our fingers. Mark has written a guidebook to live in "Thrival Mode", not from theory but from Spirit-led experience. Through a lifetime of following the Spirit's guidance Mark lays out the case for thriving in every circumstance of life. God desires to give us a passionate vision for every tomorrow. I've watched over the last 23 years Mark and Susan take that vision and wring every ounce of life out of it for God's Glory. If you are hungry to move forward, make a meaningful impact, and leave a legacy for others to build on then put this book to practice and being to live in Thrival Mode.

- Chris Jones, Lead Pastor Hope Community Church

Vision is about seeing something when there's nothing then responding to the nothing that you see and watching as it becomes something. Mark Mason is a man whose life typifies that statement. He is relentless in his vision and passion to reach and help those that society calls outcast and unworthy. I have watched as Mark has taken his vision and created something substantial from it. This book will inspire you to do the same. It will help us all to get a clear picture of what lies ahead of our lives and to move toward that vision. Get ready for vision that produces mission that will change the world.

— Jimmie Bratcher, President Connect Ministries, KC

It's been said, "the best book is the one you live first." If true, this quote describes the secret sauce of the book before you now. Mark Mason has lived the Thrival Mode message for most of his life. In the time I have known Mark, he has reinvented himself numerous times as discovers his purpose and impacts people for Christ while on the planet. Every good story moves the character from Orphan with no identity, to Wanderer who seeks, to Warrior with a mission, to Martyr willing to lay it all down for his cause. This is Mark's journey, now written down for you as a fellow sojourner. Read it and it will entertain you; live it and it will transform you.

- Pastor Ken Cramer, Lighthouse

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INTRODUCTION

I began playing guitar as a teenager. Around the same time, my younger brother Andrew took up the drums. As you can imagine, our house was a very loud one. We were heavy drinking, pot-smoking, acid dropping, juvenile delinquents with plenty of aggression. This was the perfect combination for reaching premature death or rock stardom — whichever came first. Thanks to a praying Momma and Granny, we both escaped the destructive path we were on.

For most of our adult lives, Andrew and I played in Christian bands together. Just before Andrew left this life, he decided to encroach on my turf. He bought a cheap Squier guitar at a pawnshop for \$30. He never learned to play it because he was killed a few weeks after he bought it. The guitar ended up in my collection. I quickly judged it by the label and cast it into outer darkness. It collected dust for the next 22 years.

The Fender Squier line of guitars is synonymous with low quality. They are known as entry-level beginner guitars. The Squier brand has always been made overseas as opposed to Fender's American made premium guitars. Thus, Andrew's guitar ended up being neglected. In early 2019, I picked it up again just to reminisce. I had always thought the guitar had a decent feel and playability. But it was a lowly Squier. For the first time, I noticed that the body style differed from most Squier guitars. After a bit of searching on the internet, I discovered this particular guitar was a rare, high-quality model made in Japan during the early '80s. I found it being sold on several websites for over \$800. After a few minor tweaks, Andrew's guitar was tuned up and ready for new frontiers. Because of its sound, the Squier now plays a unique role in our set list. Better yet, it has a unique story behind it.

You too have a unique role and a unique story. You are the only one of you there will ever be. There will never be another person with your fingerprints, your DNA or your story. Perhaps life has put a few degrading labels on you. Let me assure you that you are a rare, high-quality model made by a loving God. He will take all the broken pieces of your story and knit them together just to blow the world's mind. Here's the catch — you must surrender your whole being to the Master Craftsman for tweaking. That, to me, is the starting point in discovering why we're here.

What we're all after is significance

I tell prison inmates all the time there is something far worse than losing physical freedom and that is the loss of significance. We all want to count. We all want to be known for something. We all want to be remarkable. *Worthy of remark*. Pursuing significance is unfortunately why many people rack up debt by acquiring things they can't afford. They are rebranding themselves to cover the negative labels. They want to be noticed and considered significant.

I gave a passing thought to putting a new neck on Andrew's guitar. The current neck has a big Squier Bullet label on it. Since I'm a gear snob, I figured people would think I must be an amateur because I play a Squier. Then I realized, even a seemingly cheap guitar in the hands of a skilled player will dispel that notion quickly. I concluded it would be even cooler to show the world what this guitar is capable of despite the label.

You don't need a new life. You don't need a new label. You need to surrender who you are to the one who made you and allow Him to draw out your potential. That doesn't happen automatically. There are biblical principles you and I must employ to discover the works God has prepared for us. I am 56 years old as of this writing and I am confident there is still much to learn about who God made me to be. I also realize that if I don't do my part, I'll never step into all God has for me. As Christians, we like to

throw around Jeremiah 29:11 which says God has a future and a hope for us. That *future* and *hope* can only be found when we completely surrender to God and then pursue a God-honoring vision for our lives. My prayer is that the Lord uses this book like a holy hand to draw you out of dust collecting darkness. After a few minor tweaks, you'll be tuned up and ready for new frontiers!

But the noble make noble plans, and by noble deeds, they stand. Isaiah 32:8 (NIV)



1

THRIVING THROUGH VISION

“Ambition! We must be careful what we mean by it. If it means the desire to get ahead of other people — which is what I think it does mean — then it is bad. If it means simply wanting to do a thing well, then it is good. It isn’t wrong for an actor to want to act his part as well as it can possibly be acted, but the wish to have his name in bigger type than the other actors is a bad one.”

– C.S. Lewis

If you asked me what I thought the will of God is for your life, I would say, “To thrive!” The word *thrive* means to prosper, to be fortunate, successful, to develop or grow vigorously, to flourish. What good earthly father doesn’t want his children to have a life like that? How much more must God want us to thrive?

The Bible tells us that God has prepared things for us to do:

For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

I believe when we are in sync with what God has prepared for us to do, we live in what I call *thrival mode*. We live with passion — which means to live with intense desire and enthusiasm. We find joy in our labor. I don’t know about you, but I want to leave everything on the field when I leave this world. I want to die empty. I want to discover all God has planned for me to do. I don’t just want to survive this life. I want to thrive! I want to live with passion! I want to unleash all the potential God has put in me. But I realize this isn’t going to just magically happen for me — or you. God has given us a mind and an imagination and He expects us to use it.

TO THRIVE, YOU MUST HAVE A PASSION-PRODUCING VISION FOR YOUR LIFE

Everything ever created began with vision. There is no progress, no growth, no advancement, and no prosperity without vision. All that your eyes can see began as a thought or a vision in the mind of someone else. This includes the chair you’re sitting in, the device you’re reading on and you as a person. God told Jeremiah He knew him before he formed him in the womb. That means your existence was first a thought — a vision — in the mind of God. All of creation was first an idea in the mind of God before it came to be. Darkness once hovered over the face of the deep and then planet earth was turned into a thriving world teeming with growth and

life. If our Father uses the creative power of vision, then shouldn't we have that trait too?

Vision propels us to action and stirs our passion for living. When we can see the desired destination in our minds, we work harder and find joy in our labor. Without vision, we just exist. We stagnate. The Bible says we perish. I can assure you; this is not God's will for your life. His will is that you should live with passion and purpose. For that to happen you must understand the power of a vision.

WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR

First, this book is for people suffering from what I call Passion Deficit Disorder. These are the frustrated men and women struggling to find or rekindle their zeal for living. They're just going through the motions hoping for some miracle to change their circumstances. They have little or no passion (intense desire and enthusiasm) for their life's work. They've lost their mojo. They are stuck in a rut. The duties of life have blocked their view of a better future. They fight hellish commutes, work for jerk bosses, collect their pitiful paychecks and live for weekends and holidays off. They feel trapped. If that's you, you need to grasp the power of a passion-producing vision.

Second, this book is also for the man or woman who has buried a dream that needs to be rescued. Maybe life closed in on you so fast you lost sight of a dream you once had. But, it's still there. Off in the distance, it still nags at you. It even makes you angry because you think you're too old or too obligated now. That's a lie, by the way. If you are living to please God and expand His kingdom, He's the one that put that desire in you. You must stir that dream up with the power of a passion-producing vision.

Third, this book is for the young person just getting started in life. Maybe you're struggling to find you're calling or your purpose. Perhaps

you're overwhelmed by the options. Maybe your parents are pushing you to become what they want you to be. Before you set your course, you must harness the power of a passion-producing vision.

Fourth, maybe you're an entrepreneur, a businessperson or a pastor that understands the power of vision, but you find yourself stalled. You need a fresh vision. You need a reminder about how the power of vision works and moves you to the next level. This book will help. I promise.

Last, but certainly not least, this book is for the incarcerated man or woman who feels they have little or no purpose where they are. Perhaps, your family and the people you thought were your friends have forsaken you. Maybe you're doing a short stint and you're just counting the days until you're free again. Or, worse, you're a lifer that's been told you'll never be released. Friend, the breath you just took belongs to God. If He were finished with you, He'd take that breath away. He still has a plan and purpose for you right where you are. Imagine how He can use the Light within you to bring hope and freedom to the many broken souls around you this very day. Choose to live life on offense, not on defense. Choose to push forward with a passion-producing vision.

WHO AM I?

My name is Mark Mason. I am the founder and president of Life on the Verge Ministries. LOTV is a musicianary ministry that allows me to combine my love of music, speaking, writing and traveling. Many would define LOTV as a prison ministry because that's where we do most of our work. Since 2011, my wife Suzan and I have performed for and ministered to over 50,000 inmates. Though we do a lot of prison ministry, I would more accurately define LOTV as an *inspiration* ministry. We love inspiring people to take full advantage of the freedom Christ has offered us. Yes, freedom from sin, guilt, and shame, but also the freedom to live an abundant life. You may not be in a physical prison, but you could be suffering from a

prison of your own making; a prison that keeps you from seeing all God has purchased for you. In John 10:10 (ESV), Jesus said, “I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly.” The word we translate “abundant” means *a rich and satisfying life, beyond what is expected, exceeding expectation*. I hope this book inspires you to take Jesus up on His offer.

Vision is a leader

As a teenager, I was on the fast track to jail or early death. I was kicked out of three high schools, arrested a half-dozen times and had a serious drug and alcohol problem. All that changed on November 23, 1982, when I gave my life to Christ. I was 19 years old with an eighth-grade education and no real vision for my future. I was working at a local supermarket making \$4.00 an hour and living in a \$90/month rattrap apartment with my brand-new wife. We were just happy to be alive.

One day, as I was tossing oranges on the produce rack at my job, I sensed what I believe was the voice of the Lord. It wasn't an audible voice, but it was loud in my head and heart. A thought dominated my brain, “Mark, you're only 19 years old. You can be whatever you want to be.” To the average person nowadays, this is not a revolutionary thought. But it was for me. When you've lived the life I had lived, you can feel much older than you really are. I was just happy being saved, married and employed. I had no dreams, no ambitions, no goals, and no vision. That day, however, I began to see things differently. I began to understand the power of vision.

Without delay, I left the produce rack that day and walked over to the store's bookrack. I picked up two books: *Mathematics Made Simple* and *English Made Simple*. Vision led me to the local library to study every day until I got my GED (High School Equivalency Certificate). Vision led me to graduate from vocational school then college. Vision led me to become a police officer, then a detective and eventually a forensic investigator. Vision led me to leave law enforcement for full-time pastoral ministry in 1995.

Vision led my wife and me to found Life on the Verge Ministries. Vision is a leader and it will lead you to pleasant places!

The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. Psalm 16:6 (NIV)

WHAT THIS BOOK WILL DO FOR YOU

My prayer is this book will help you unpack all that God has put inside you. If you're reading this then you know there must be more. You're seeking it. I hope by the end of this book you'll be motivated to take another step toward *thrival mode*. My prayer is that fresh vision will ignite your passion for living and lead you to new frontiers. Take this short journey with me as we look at

- the characteristics of a passion-producing vision;
- the purpose of a passion-producing vision;
- the source of a passion-producing vision;
- developing a passion-producing vision;
- staying focused on a passion-producing vision;
- the obstacles that can hijack a passion-producing vision;
- navigating the risk of a passion-producing vision; and
- understanding the necessity of a passion producing vision.



2

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A PASSION-PRODUCING VISION

“Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man’s power ends.”

– George Müller

Lack of vision will weaken your emotional immune system and make you susceptible to Passion Deficit Disorder. PDD isn't a condition recognized by the American Medical Association as far I know, but it's fatal to your success in life. PDD will rob you of joy and keep you from living in *thrival mode*. I would suggest the antidote for PDD is a PPV – a passion-producing vision! Throughout this book, I will use the terms vision, passion-producing vision or PPV interchangeably to convey that the power of vision should generate intense desire and enthusiasm for living. Let's look at a few characteristics of a PPV.

A PASSION-PRODUCING VISION IS A DETAILED MENTAL PICTURE OF A PREFERRED FUTURE

God has given us this amazing faculty called *imagination*. You use it every time you prepare for a meal. For example, let's say you're at work in your cubicle and it's 11 o'clock. Lunchtime is at noon, but your stomach is already letting you know it's time to get to work on a vision for lunch. Your mind crafts a picture of a preferred future. You would prefer to not be hungry. You need things to change. You need different now. You envision where you will go and what you will eat. That vision becomes a reality as you take the first bite. Just about everything in life that produces desired change requires this same process.

For instance, if things are going to change as far as your vocation, the difference must be seen in the mind first. If you are at point A but you'd rather be at point B, then you must put your mind to work and craft a vision. You must imagine a detailed mental picture of a preferred future. The problem is, we only use vision for more immediate tasks like fixing a meal, taking a vacation or redecorating the house. But we can use the power of vision to redirect the entire course of our lives. When you develop a clear mental picture of where you'd rather be in life, the mind goes to work on the solution.

Another example of how we use vision is when we need a newer car. Typically, when this happens we narrow things down to the make, model, year and even the color. This happened to us recently and that's what we did. After more research, we knew that we wanted an older Honda Pilot. We needed something that we could tow behind our RV with all four wheels on the ground. The 2003 and older Pilots fit the bill. Guess what, when we knew in our minds what we were after, we saw older Honda Pilots everywhere. They were there all the time. We just gave our mind something to work with! Within a few months, we found the perfect 2003 Honda Pilot.

A passion-producing vision may take years to become a reality. Even still, if you never imagine what could be, should be and must be, you can be sure it will never be. You may not achieve everything you have a vision for in life, but one thing is certain: you will achieve nothing without first developing a detailed mental picture of a preferred future.

A PASSION-PRODUCING VISION DRIVES BEHAVIOR AND ACTIVATES ENTHUSIASM

Something you can do right now is this: imagine what would make your life better and more fulfilling. Paint a detailed picture in your mind of exactly what you would be doing if the world were your oyster. As you meditate on your vision and visualize what could be and should be, don't be surprised when it becomes a must be. This deep thinking leads to action. When you can see the desired outcome in your mind, you will be more apt to rearrange your priorities and move toward it. Then, these small action steps will create momentum and stir your passion for living.

The importance of sightseeing

In 1991, my wife and I were renting a house in the neighborhood where we grew up. It was a nice house, but the area had gone downhill and crime was at an all-time high. As a police detective, I was well aware of the danger

lurking around my growing family. There had been five homicides within a mile of our home that year. We knew things had to change. So, we got a vision.

We dreamed of buying a place in a safe area with good schools and low crime. That vision compelled us to go for long Sunday drives in search of the right house. Those little sightseeing adventures stirred our *could be* and *should be* into a *must be*. We eventually put a contract on a nice six-year-old Cape Cod in the suburbs. It had a deck on the back, a privacy fence and a full-length front porch where I could sip my sweet tea. For the next three months, the vision of living in that house pushed us to work more overtime and save every penny. The vision was driving our behavior and stirring our enthusiasm. We were psyched! Though we barely had enough cash to close, ninety days later I was sitting on that porch sipping sweet tea and dreaming again.

Dream and dream again

We bought the house because that's what you're supposed to do, right? That's how you live the American Dream, I thought. It didn't take long for me to realize I had boxed myself in with possessions. After seven years as a cop, I wanted to do more than clean up the devil's handiwork. I wanted to reach young people before they ended up in a body bag. I wanted to go into youth ministry full time, but I was trapped by financial circumstances. Still, I could dream. I could create a picture in my mind of a preferred future and act as if. Thus, I began to practice a principle that has guided our lives for decades now:

Do what you can where you are with what you have, and God won't leave you where you're at.

My vision of going into ministry full time drove me to budget my time and money in such a way to make the seemingly impossible possible. I

studied via correspondence one course at a time to acquire my ministerial credentials even though practically, there was no way I could afford the pay cut this job change would produce. This brings us to the third characteristic of vision.

A PASSION-PRODUCING VISION IS THE PREREQUISITE FOR PROVISION

Too often we imagine what we would do if we only had the money. This is faithless thinking. Vision acts as if the money is already there. When you have a vision, you do all you can where you are with what you have. One of my favorite scriptures is in Ecclesiastes.

Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well. Ecclesiastes 11:6 (NIV)

So, let's say you have a job and a lot of responsibility. That's the seed you sow in the morning. But you can do what I did and sow some seed in the evening too. I made a list of questions like this and began to act on the list:

What small things can I do right now with the time I have?

Who can I talk to or meet with that can help me with my vision?

Where can I go to stir up my vision and bring definition to it? Is there a conference or a seminar that would help me?

What books can I read or course can I take that will feed my vision?

How can I get involved in some small way with what I want to eventually do full time?

Schedule the meeting, make the call, get involved!

My first step was to schedule a meeting with the youth pastor at the church we were attending. He told me how I could acquire ministerial credentials via correspondence courses. I started studying when I could and also volunteered to help out with the youth ministry. My first volunteer ministry assignment was to mop the gym floor after youth services. I tell everyone that our last 30 years of ministry came out of the end of a mop handle. That small strand of commitment kept me involved and focused on my vision. It also connected me to people who would help me with my vision. Many support our ministry to this day.

God has all you need to fulfill your vision. But what good father would give a million dollars to a kid with a three-dollar vision. You can't even borrow money from a bank without a clearly articulated vision for how it will be used. Develop your vision and take it to the miracle moment. Do all you can where you are with what you have. In God's economy, vision is always the prerequisite for provision.

A PASSION-PRODUCING VISION CALLS FOR HARD WORK

The movie *Shawshank Redemption* paints a vivid picture of how inmates become institutionalized. After decades in prison, the character named Brooks is released back into society. Unfortunately, he has no idea how to use his newfound freedom. He doesn't know how to function without someone telling him when to be where and how to do what. Constant oversight had made him totally reliant on someone else's vision for his life — the warden. We too can become institutionalized — by our jobs.

It is vital that we serve someone else's vision for a season in order to develop our own vision. However, this service can become a vision killer. We can become so dependent on someone telling us where to be and what to do that we diminish our ability to think for ourselves.

For example, a typical job might require you to be at your desk by 9:00 am, take lunch at noon and go home at 5:00 pm. Your employer trains you to do exactly what they want to be done during those working hours as well. Now, let's suppose you just won the lottery and you don't need or want that job anymore. After you've taken the vacations, bought the Rolls Royce and moved into your mansion, what purposeful work would you do from 9-5 each day (or whatever work hours you choose). All those things you bought might make you happy for a short time, but what actually brings fulfillment is contribution. So, what would you do? Would you know how to handle this kind of freedom? This is the hard work of vision.

My wife and I have more freedom than ever before. Consequently, we work harder than we've ever worked. There is no one to tell us what to do or when to be where. We must constantly work at vision — both short term and long term. Too many people never achieve their dreams because they are not willing to do the hard work of imagining exactly what they would do without a boss telling them what to do.

A PASSION-PRODUCING VISION REQUIRES FAITH

Most believers would say they hope to please God with their lives. Well, the Bible says, "Without faith, it is impossible to please God." Faith is the currency of heaven. Faith moves the heart of God because it demonstrates our trust in Him. Vision requires that we act as if what we're hoping for will come to pass regardless of how outlandish our dream is.

The answer is always no if you don't ask

In my last semester of college before graduating with a degree in Electronic Engineering Technology, I decided that I wanted to be a police officer. I got a vision for it. That may not seem like it took a lot of faith but considering my background it was almost laughable. I had been arrested numerous

times as a juvenile by the very department I dreamed of working for. But I could not let the fear of failure or doubt rob me of my vision. This picture of a preferred future drove my actions even in the face of a very questionable outcome. I had to believe that if God was in it, I would win it. I saw myself in that uniform, wearing that badge and driving really fast in a police car someday. Putting in the application cost me nothing but a little bit of faith. It took almost a year of testing, but the Norfolk Police Department hired me. I spent seven years with that department working alongside cops that had once arrested me. I served as a patrol officer, a detective, and a forensic investigator. I was the lead crime scene investigator on 23 homicides and helped put a lot of bad people behind bars. Later in life, I spent another two years with the Virginia Beach Police Department and about 18 months with the Gloucester County Sheriff's Office. Through faith, God can make an impossible vision possible.

MAIN IDEAS:

- **Vision is a vivid, detailed mental picture of the change you would like to see.**
- **Vision is the prerequisite for provision.**
- **Demonstrate your trust in God by doing the small things.**
- **Do all you can where you are with what you have, and God won't leave you where you're at.**
- **Work hard at your vision or settle into serving someone else's.**
- **Remember, without faith, it is impossible to please God. Faith without works is dead.**



3

THE PURPOSE OF A PASSION PRODUCING VISION

“...it’ so much more important than any touchdown or trophy or anything you could win with football. It’s taking that platform and being able to influence people.”

– Tim Tebow

THE PURPOSE OF A PASSION-PRODUCING VISION SHOULD BE KINGDOM EXPANSION

Jesus told us that the kingdom is within us (Luke 17:21 KJV). Kingdoms are not religious bodies. Kingdoms are government bodies. Jesus didn't come to set up a new religion. Jesus came to restore the kingdom of God on earth. His atoning work on the cross has opened up the way for His government to be established in our hearts. When we are born again, the Holy Spirit becomes the governor of our mind. We are given the mind of Christ. The laws of God's kingdom now govern us. As we keep in step with the Holy Spirit and have fellowship with God, we become more and more like Jesus. Just going through the motions of religion will not accomplish what God is trying to do in us. His endgame is to make us more and more like Jesus. When people see us, they should see Jesus. They should realize there is a kingdom where love, joy, and peace reign supreme.

As we walk with the Lord, He puts hopes, dreams, and desires in us that will maximize our influence on earth for His glory. Where we show up, the kingdom shows us. Jesus used yeast in a batch of dough as an example. It only takes a little yeast to impact a large amount of dough. When the yeast is mixed in, it causes the whole batch of dough to rise over time.

He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough. Matthew 13:33 (NIV)

God wants His children to infiltrate every sphere of society with His love. Your vision should ultimately be to expand His kingdom and cause people to see Jesus. A perfect example of this is Chick-Fil-A.

Advancing the kingdom with a chicken sandwich

Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-Fil-A, was a committed believer. He mandated that the restaurants be closed on Sunday to honor God and give families the freedom to attend church. I don't think he viewed this as some kind of legal requirement from God. He did it to honor God and bless his employees. He wanted to fulfill God's overarching vision for the redemption of mankind. He wanted the world to know that Chick-Fil-A would be a God-trusting business. The result is that Chick-Fil-A went from being a tiny diner in Atlanta, GA to America's favorite fast-food restaurant. The company earns as much in six days a week as other fast-food restaurants do in seven. The yeast has affected the whole batch and caused the entire fast-food industry to take notice.

Truett Cathy had the vision to build a high-quality fast-food chain. But more than that, his greater vision was to expand the kingdom of God. He wanted to show the world he could operate his life and business in a God-honoring way and still be tremendously successful. He refused to compromise his convictions. He refused to open the stores seven days a week even though that looked more profitable. Greed is not permitted in the kingdom of God. Therefore, greed could not be part of the Chick-Fil-A ethos. God has honored Cathy's vision because his ultimate goal was to advance the kingdom.

THE PURPOSE OF A PASSION-PRODUCING VISION IS TO BRING JOY AND FULFILLMENT

What father doesn't want his child to enjoy life? If all God wanted to do is save us from our sins, He could have taken us to heaven the moment we confessed. That's not His intent. God wants us to have fellowship with Him. He wants us to join Him on a journey of discovery. He has hidden many gems that will bring us great joy as we walk with Him.

It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out. Proverbs 25:2 (ESV)

The joy of discovery

When I first came to faith in Christ there was so much I didn't see. Over time, He has shown me things I never would have discovered without Him. Nineteen-year-old me had no idea that I would make my living as a public speaker. I never envisioned graduating from college or influencing thousands for God's glory. It just never entered into my mind. But the Bible says,

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined — what God has prepared for those who love him. 1 Corinthians 2:9 (NLT)

However, it's not the accomplishment of great things that brings me joy and fulfillment. It's the discovery process. If I stay in fellowship with Him, he continues to give me a vision for things that will expand His kingdom but also bring me great joy.

For most of my ministry life, I didn't give prison ministry a second thought. Then, in 2011, God gave me the first opportunity to play music and minister in a penitentiary. I was smitten. My heart exploded with new-found joy. I had discovered my new niche. After 30 years, my vision to be a musicianary has growing more and more vivid.

A faith-driven vision to expand the kingdom of God will take you on a great adventure. Your quest will lead you through many valleys and over many peaks. You will learn to lean on God like never before. At times you may feel like you're hanging off a cliff by a thread. But you will also discover that the real joy of life is in the journey.

THE PURPOSE OF A PASSION-PRODUCING VISION IS TO SERVE OTHERS

We've all heard it said, "Money can't buy you happiness." Well, that's a lie. If you give me all of your money, I will be very happy! Let's try it! The thing is, happiness is an emotion with a short shelf life. We are happy when we get a new car, but sad when it breaks down. We are happy when we move into the new house, but the novelty wears off when the roof starts to leak. Money is a wonderful servant but a terrible master.

What we are really after is fulfillment — a deep abiding sense of purpose. That only comes from positive contribution. Jesus said we are more blessed to give than receive and it's true.

In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive. Acts 20:35 (NIV)

This makes me think about my wife on Thanksgiving Day. She gets a vision to prepare a great feast for others. She creates a vivid mental picture in her mind of what could be, should be and must be for her guests. That vision drives her behavior. She enthusiastically goes to the grocery store and picks up everything she needs to make the vision a reality. She then labors for hours over the hot stove to prepare the meal. It never fails — she's always the last one to eat. She didn't cook the meal for herself. She would have been just as happy with a ham sandwich. She did it for others. Her fulfillment comes from watching others enjoy what her vision created.

As I write this book, I am trying to serve you. I get some joy out of tapping these keys and watching the words magically appear. But the greatest joy will be knowing that perhaps a few of these words helped someone else get a passion-producing vision for their life.

Don't just think about what you would like to do or accomplish. Think about what you could do with what you have that meets the needs of others.

THE PURPOSE OF A PASSION-PRODUCING VISION SHOULD BE IMPACT AND INFLUENCE

I think of impact as immediate and in the moment. Influence is more lasting. For example, the Founding Fathers made a huge impact on the world when they signed the Declaration of Independence. They ignited the Revolutionary War! However, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights have continued to influence the world for centuries. Aren't you thankful that these men had the vision to impact their world at the time but also to influence our world to this day?

The goal of your vision should be to impact the world while you're here but also to leave a legacy that influences future generations. Who will be thankful that you lived and followed through on your vision?

Believe it or not, my vision for lasting influence isn't to be a martyr-hero for prison ministry. Though my wife and I are making an impact in prisons, our ultimate hope is to leave a legacy that demonstrates our trust in God. Proverbs 13:22 says:

A good person leaves an inheritance for their children's children...
(NIV)

Jesus told us not to store up treasures on earth, so surely a monetary inheritance is not the priority here. We want our children to see that God is faithful. He can be trusted. He will make a way where there seems to be no way. We want them to see and remember the miraculous things God has done as we moved forward with vision.

Friend, this life is temporary, but God has prepared passion producing, kingdom advancing works for you to do while you're here. As you walk with Lord, He will give you a vision for the things that will most impact your world now and influence it beyond the grave.

MAIN IDEAS:

- **Make kingdom advancement the overarching goal of your vision.**
- **Do the things that give you the greatest sense of joy in the Lord.**
- **A passion-producing vision should help others and include others.**
- **A passion-producing vision should affect the here and now.**
- **A passion-producing vision should create a legacy of influence.**
Success in this life is temporary because this life is temporary.



4

THE SOURCE OF A PASSION PRODUCING VISION

“If artists who make statues and paint portraits of kings are held in high esteem, will not God bless ten thousand times more those who reveal and beautify His royal image?”

– St. John Chrysostom

DISSATISFACTION IS A SOURCE OF A PASSION-PRODUCING VISION

Contentment and satisfaction can be viewed as two different things. For instance, I am content in knowing that my salvation is secure, and that God will always meet my needs according to His riches in glory. But I don't ever want to be so satisfied that I lose my hunger to advance in life. I don't want to be satisfied with just getting by. That's not life in *thrival mode*. I'm always seeking God for fresh vision and looking for new opportunities to serve others.

I've heard it said, "Change happens when the pain of staying where you are is greater than the pain of change." When we start to lose our zeal for living, we begin to "perish." This is often due to a lack of vision. Something in us tells us we are out of sync with who God made us to be. Vision produces hope that things can get better. So, if you're feeling dissatisfied in your work, be encouraged. Dissatisfaction is the seedbed of vision. That appetite for different, for more and better should drive a believer to his or her knees asking, seeking and knocking!

Ask and keep on asking and it will be given to you; seek and keep on seeking and you will find; knock and keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who keeps on asking receives, and he who keeps on seeking finds, and to him who keeps on knocking, it will be opened. Matthew 7:7-8 (AMP)

PERSISTENT PRAYER AND PETITION IS A SOURCE OF PASSION-PRODUCING VISION

Paul wrote in the book of Philippians that we should not be anxious about anything but rather we should approach God with thanksgiving and then present our requests to Him.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Philippians 4:6

We should always approach God with heartfelt gratitude. In my own life, I come before God with an attitude that says, “Lord, if I die today — thank you. Even if I never accomplish another thing — thank you.” But then I also realize He has invited me to petition Him — to come boldly before His throne of grace in time of need and receive mercy. His word encourages me to seek Him and to bear fruit. Thus, I need to offer petitions to the Lord.

Petitioning the Lord is a right and a responsibility

Paul didn’t say it would be a good idea to offer our petitions to God. He told us to do it! A petition is defined as follows:

A formally drawn request, addressed to a person or group of persons in authority or power, soliciting some favor, right, mercy, or other benefit. (Dictionary.com)

Let’s say that many small children play outside in your neighborhood. You see the need for a “Children at Play” sign because people are driving way too fast through the area. As a conscientious citizen, you have a responsibility to rectify the situation. You also have the right to petition the local government for a sign. To exercise this right, you would need to spend considerable time putting that petition together. You would likely draft a detailed document explaining why the sign is necessary. You might also be allowed to vocally argue why the sign should be and must be posted. Because there are so many other factors in play, you may have to present your case for months or years before the board finally answers your plea.

When we come before God, we should be just as vigilant. In Matthew 10:51, Jesus asked blind Bartimaeus, “What do you want me to do for you?” Wasn’t it obvious? Well yes, but Jesus wanted to clarify that we have a role to play. We are to make our specific needs known. That way, God receives glory when the miracle comes.

Persistent prayer and petition fulfilled the promise

In my case, I found myself dissatisfied with being a pastor. Don’t get me wrong. I loved the people and the people loved me. I also had a decent salary and benefits. We had built a stellar team of volunteers that enabled me to focus mainly on preaching and teaching. Still, I had this unsettling sense there was something else I was supposed to do. I couldn’t put my finger on it, but I knew it involved music and evangelism. Eventually, I got so frustrated that I prayed like I should have been praying all along. Isn’t it a shame we rarely seek God like we ought until we’re in utter despair?

I took a cue from Caleb. He and Joshua were the only two spies that were confident the Israelites could take the Promise Land. The other ten doubted which left the whole nation wandering in the wilderness for 40 years — including Joshua and Caleb. Once that generation died off, Joshua was commissioned by God to lead the Israelites in taking over the Promise Land. By this time, Caleb was 85 years old. Here’s what he said:

As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in. Now, therefore, give me this mountain of which the Lord spoke in that day; Joshua 14:11-12 (KJV)

I began to pray like Caleb, “Lord, give me my mountain.” I didn’t even know what my mountain was. What I meant was, “Lord, give me my

vision.” I printed out that prayer and posted it all over my house. I put it on the bathroom mirror, the frame of my closet, the front door, the fridge, etc. I wanted to be reminded to pray that prayer all day, every day. Slowly but surely, over a period of months, I saw more and more what I was to do next. I placed a map of the United States on my office wall because I could see that part of my mountain (vision) was travel. I prayed over that map, “Give me my mountain.” As the vision took shape, I knew we needed to start a non-profit 501c3. I had no idea how to do this, but I had the vision to do it and that vision was producing passion. Over the next year or so, God showed me bits and pieces of the vision to where it became clear — we were to be full-time musicianaries reaching the least of these in places where the devil thinks he reigns. There was still much to do, but the detailed, mental picture of a preferred future was getting clearer through prayer and petition.

DESIRE IS A SOURCE OF PASSION-PRODUCING VISION

Desire is a wonderful leader, so long as it's leading you in the right direction! Psalm 37: 4 says:

Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. (ESV)

I used to think that meant if I served God, He would give me what I want. Now, I understand this passage to mean that if I find my deepest delight in serving and pleasing God, He will cause me to desire the things that are best for my life. If your deepest intention is to magnify God and expand His kingdom, you can trust your desires. He will cause you to want the things that line up with His will and your potential.

Rockin' for the Rock

For most of my life, I've had a desire to play music for a living. I started playing when I was 13 because I wanted to be like Ace Frehley from the band KISS. Ace was the epitome of cool. I wanted to be like Ace. I wanted to strap on a Gibson Les Paul and make the crowd go wild. That desire led me to save every dime until I could purchase my first electric guitar. It was a \$31.00 piece of junk from K-Mart. My desire further led me to spend hours at my turntable trying to figure out songs. That's right kids — a turntable. There was no YouTube in those days. You learned songs by moving the needle on the record player back and forth. I digress. My desire to be a rock star soon led me to seek out other players. At 16, I joined my first band. We called ourselves Electric Angel.

Our first big gig was in 1979. We played to a packed house at Kempsville High School in Virginia Beach, Virginia. One song in our setlist was *Breaking the Law* by the band, Judas Priest. While neither Glenn Tipton nor K.K. Downing played a lead solo in the original version, I did! And, when I bent the first note in that solo, the crowd went wild. I was gob-smacked. I made the guitar my god.

After a few more years of sex, drugs and rock n roll, the Lord in his grace let me see the tragic trajectory I was on. I gave my life to Christ in 1982 and soon after, I lifted my guitar to the Lord and prayed, "God, I have used this for all the wrong reasons. Let me use it for your glory from now on." Over 40 years have passed and the desire to bend those notes and enjoy moving a crowd has never left me. But today, I've got a deeper motive than my own gratification. I want to use my craft to advance His kingdom.

The desire to be so good at something that people are moved to pay attention to you is not necessarily a bad thing. If your ultimate goal in life is to bring God's love into your sphere of influence, you can trust your desires. He will cause you to want the things He knows you will be remarkable at. These desires can be a major key to developing a passion-producing vision.

MAIN IDEAS:

- **Don't despise your appetite for change – feed it.**
- **Thank God for all He has done but expect more.**
- **Activate your right and responsibility to petition God.**
- **Draw up a petition that clearly defines your vision and convinces you of why it must happen.**
- **If you're serious, pray and fast like never before.**
- **Examine your desires as you delight yourself in the Lord. Don't cheat yourself by aiming too low.**



5

DEVELOPING A PASSION- PRODUCING VISION

“Start by doing what’s necessary; then do what’s possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.”

– Francis of Assisi

VISION BEGINS AS AN IDEA

Vision begins as an idea that won't go away. As we nurture this idea it can become a conviction. What *could be* becomes what *should be* and eventually *must be*. This is how you know you're lining up with something God put in you. The idea may seem absolutely ridiculous at first. It may seem impractical, unconventional, unreasonable and impossible. But it just won't go away.

I told you about lifting my guitar to the Lord and telling Him I wanted to use it for His glory. The deeper intent of my prayer was that I wanted to use music to reach people far from God. I didn't necessarily want to be a worship leader. Nor, did I want to be a musician that only played music for other believers. My idea was to use music as a bridge-building tool for anyone that would listen — especially those outside of the church. Not until 1992 did the idea start to grow.

That year, I formed a Christian rock band with my younger brother Andrew and some guys at church. When I wasn't working as a detective or taking care of my family, we played occasional church services and youth functions. I suppose we were giving the church kids an alternative to so-called secular music. I would do this with various bands for years to come. However, playing music for believers was not exactly the fulfillment of my vision.

During this season in the early nineties, my wife and I took a trip to Lancaster, PA to pray and fast. We used Friday as our fasting day and planned to eat big in Amish country for the rest of the weekend. We were so broke that we could only afford a cheap motel for one night. The rest of the weekend was spent in a tent.

When we arrived at the motel, I saw a group of leather-clad young people hanging outside of a room smoking, drinking and carrying on. I said to my wife, "Those are the ones I have a heart for. I'd love to have a huge truck

with a stage that we could set up in a public square and reach people that may never come to church.” We enjoyed the weekend and I didn’t give this idea another thought. But I took note, the same desire I had when I came to the Lord in 1982 was still there ten years later. A passion-producing vision begins as an idea that won’t go away.

THE FULFILLMENT OF A VISION ALWAYS REQUIRES WISE COUNSEL

You cannot accomplish your vision without the help of others. You need wise counsel. You need mentors. You need models to look at. We rob others and ourselves when we try to accomplish our vision alone. We miss the blind spots. We are also apt to get out of step and miss the timing of God. This is why I think it is vital to be involved with a group of believers who have to love you whether they like you or not:)

Burden doesn’t always necessitate timing

In the early stages of trying to become a *musicianary*, I almost quit my job as a police detective. With no real plan or strategy, I was going to just wing it. I was simply disgusted by what I was seeing as a crime scene investigator and fed up with my long commute to work. I figured if I stepped out on the water, God would keep me from sinking. After reading a couple of books on faith, I was ready to make my move. But first, I decided to meet with my pastor and tell him about my wonderful plans. I was certain he would applaud my great boldness. Instead, he wept and told me I was getting ahead of God. He told me I shouldn’t do what I wanted to do. That made me so mad I wanted to punch him in the mouth. But after I thought it over, I knew he was right. Burden doesn’t always necessitate timing. Today, I thank God for his counsel. I would have surely crashed and burned without it.

As of this writing, I am 56 years old. I still lean on mentors. I still seek the counsel of those zealous for my success. Without wise counsel, we set ourselves up for failure:

Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers, they succeed.
Proverbs 15:22 (NIV)

The temptation can be to try and go it alone. The idea of a *self-made man* is a lie. We all need other people to help us fulfill our vision. Isolating yourself is folly. The Bible says so:

Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment. Proverbs 18:1 (ESV)

A genuine vision is worth waiting for

Soon after meeting with my pastor that day, I felt led to press pause on our band. I dedicated all of my spare time to helping our church's new youth pastor. I still led worship in youth services but that's all I was doing with music. I was also doing things like chaperoning ski trips and counseling at youth camp. I realized that God was calling me to be a youth pastor – not a musicianary, at least not yet. Without the wise counsel of my pastor, I would have completely missed this crucial phase of discovery.

In 1995, I took my first full-time ministry position. I became the youth pastor at a small church in West Virginia. My brother soon relocated to help us with the new endeavor, and it didn't take long before we had formed another Christian rock/worship band. We called the band *A.U.D.I.O. Impact*. The name wasn't really meant to be an acronym but one member suggested that it should stand for *Ambassadors Under Discipleship In Operation*. This proposal from my friend B.J. Gregg helped steer our entire vision for the band (another case in point of how we need

others to fulfill our vision). We utilized young people as our roadies, tech team, lighting crew, etc. In exchange for their involvement we gave them free music lessons every Saturday. All the while, we used every opportunity to disciple them. It was a fantastic program, but again we only played at church events. This project would end less than two years later due to a very tragic circumstance.

IT TAKES TIME IN THE FIRE TO SHAPE A VISION

God is not only trying to teach us things through the trials we face, but He is also drawing us into complete dependence upon Him. Luke 5:1-11 records how Jesus taught this lesson to a band of weary fishermen.

Luke tells us that Simon Peter and his fishing buddies were washing their nets after a fruitless night on the sea. I don't know if you've ever spent all night fishing on a boat or a pier, but I have. By dawn, you feel pretty disgusting. The wind and salt leave a layer of funk on your body so thick you can taste it. The rising sun seems to bake that stink into your very soul. It's oh so much more demeaning when you come up empty-handed. These guys weren't casting the latest Shimano Stella spinning reel either. They were tossing heavy rope nets into the sea and drawing them back up — all night long.

Just as they were calling it quits, Jesus steps into one of the boats and tells them to put out a little from the shore. A crowd had gathered on the beach and Jesus needed to do a little waterfront teaching. I can tell you this: going to church is about the last thing I would've felt like doing. These guys had to be dead on their feet. "Finally, He's done," I can hear Simon whisper as Jesus delivered the benediction. But then, the rabbi-carpenter does the unimaginable. He tells the professional fisherman to cast their already cleaned nets one more time. Simon submits but not without a rebuttal:

And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless, at thy word, I will let down the net. Luke 5:5 (KJV)

The word *nevertheless* changed everything.

Luke records that because Simon obeyed, he and his crew caught so many fish it almost broke their nets. The end result was that Simon repented and recognized Jesus as Lord. After that episode, he put his nets away and became a fisher of men.

Expect a nevertheless moment as you pursue your vision

My brother had no wife or kids. Thus, his approach to reaching people was beyond radical. He frequently brought drug addicts into his home. I once warned him that those kinds of people would rob him blind. He put me in my place and said, “Man, that’s nothin’ but stuff. We should be about loving people.” He was absolutely right. To this day, his words impact and influence our ministry.

I got to play music for the last time with Andrew on Sunday, February 1, 1997. Two nights later, one of the young men he had been ministering to broke into his trailer and shot him for no apparent reason. He was only 29 years old.

The hardest year of my life

Six months after the murderer had been arrested, he escaped the mental health facility during pre-trial evaluation. We happened to be renting his grandmother’s house at the time. The moment I received the call letting me know he was on the loose, I knew I had to get my family out of that house. He had already burned down his grandfather’s trailer not long before he

killed Andrew. So, we gathered up the kids and headed to a friend's place nearby. Our children never saw the inside of what was once their home again. All five of us ended up living in that friend's bedroom for three months while we searched for a new place to live.

A breakdown that led to a breakthrough

Becoming a small church youth pastor at 32 years old with a family of five required some financial acrobatics. We couldn't afford to buy a house or even pay the going rate for rent. But God made a way. We were renting the aforementioned house for only \$350.00 a month. It was a great hilltop home on seven beautiful acres. That is until the killer escaped and I reckoned we might be sitting ducks for his next act of violence. So, after moving in with our dear friend Donna Collison, I had no idea how we would find another affordable place to live. Our stay there was deemed indefinite. I talked to everyone I knew and searched the classified ads every day. The cheapest rent we could find was \$900 a month. There was no way we could afford that.

One night, after a short date with Suzan, we pulled into Donna's driveway and had a chat. I told her I was sorry for leading her and the kids into this mess. I said, "I once gave you a house with a nice porch, a deck, and shrubbery. Now, we live in a bedroom and I have no idea what to do." What Suzan said next shook the heavens, "Mark, I don't care if we live in a cardboard box so long as we are doing what God called us to do."

This was a much bigger deal than you might think. You see I had grown up in church. I had heard many, many glory stories and I supposed we might be in the middle of one. Suzan, on the other hand, didn't have that heritage. When she said those words, a supernatural peace came over me. I knew I had chosen a woman with just the right amount of crazy.

The next week, a man who had previously told me he didn't know of any rental properties, came to tell me about his three rich aunts' house

coming up for rent. These dear ladies rented us a farmhouse on 26 acres complete with a chicken coop and smokehouse for \$350 a month. It was perfect place to raise a family.

Sometimes trials are multi-faceted

All was well until we got close to the court date. Associates of the killer thought we weren't going along with a plea bargain regarding the case, so they began to pressure us. They stalked my wife in the grocery store, crept around our house at night, bashed our mailbox and sent threatening messages through people connected with the church. One man even dared to interrupt a youth service. Finally, one night, someone pulled up to our bedroom window on a motorcycle and revved the engine throwing mud all over the side of our house. I had had enough.

The next day, I packed up my family for Virginia Beach and told the pastor we may or may not be back. In reality, I had no intention of returning — except to retrieve our belongings. The following week, I went to a prayer meeting at my mom's church. I found a spot between the pews and fell to my knees. I was in the deepest anguish I had ever experienced. I didn't know how I would support my family, but I knew I wasn't going back to West Virginia. I poured my heart out to God and argued that I had to leave for the safety of my wife and kids. I sensed the Holy Spirit say, "I love your wife and kids more than you ever will. Don't use them as a reason to run." Now I was getting angry. I turned around and grabbed a Bible from the back of the pew behind me. As I randomly opened it, my eyes fell immediately on this passage:

Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes, you will see them. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."
Isaiah 30:20-21 (NIV)

Oh my gosh! I was boiling mad at God now. “How can you ask me to go back there?” I cried.

I went back to my mom’s house that night and my dear Granny handed me a stack of preaching tapes. I threw them aside with no intention of listening to them. The sermon tape that landed on top was titled: *Just Don’t Quit*. “Dang it!” I thought. By the end of the week, I realized God wasn’t going to let me off the hook. I knew in my spirit if I didn’t go back, I would be short-circuiting God’s plan. This made me angrier than I have ever been in my life. On our last day in Virginia Beach, I took that *Just Don’t Quit* tape in the bathroom and broke it to pieces. I was immediately reminded of the prophet Ezekiel. He did what God told him to do, but he went bitter and so did I:

The Spirit then lifted me up and took me away, and I went in bitterness and in the anger of my spirit, with the strong hand of the LORD on me. Ezekiel 3:14 (NIV)

Big victories come at the close of big battles

Once we started heading back, a peace came over me. It was as if I had passed a test. I could feel the strong hand of the Lord upon me. The following week I was back in the pulpit for our weekly youth service. We had more kids there than ever before. That growth continued until attendance was averaging over 100 kids each week. The youth group was almost as large as the whole church on a Sunday morning. Still, I wondered if my vision to be a musicianary would ever come to pass.

A couple of weeks after our return to West Virginia, I began to passionately petition God about my vision to be a musicianary. One day, I found myself on the floor of a Sunday School class just pounding on heaven’s door, “Lord, you took my brother home. He was my only brother and my lifelong bandmate. At least send me some musicians to form a band with!”

Those sentences don't do justice to the intensity of my prayer that day. I was literally bawling and screaming into the carpet. Less than a week later, God answered that prayer.

The next Sunday, a leather-clad long-hair showed up at that little country church. I thought he either had to be a straight-up heathen, a Christian biker or a musician. He was both of the latter. Bob Hahn was a Christian biker and drummer. He and his best friend Rick Dawson — a fantastic bass player — had just left a Christian band and were looking for a new gig. In less than three weeks our band *Neverthirst* was a pretty tight outfit. Better yet, Bob and Rick became like brothers to me. And to think, I was only one *nevertheless* away from ever meeting them.

We stayed at the small church in West Virginia for two and a half more years. During that season the storm subsided, and God caused our ministry there to flourish. We were blessed to provide opportunities for several new youth leaders during that time. Little did we know, one new volunteer would one day become the pastor of that church. He wrote the forward to this book. Again, Suzan and I were only one *nevertheless* away from getting to be a part of all God was doing.

A PASSION-PRODUCING VISION WILL BRING CONVERGENCE

My wife loves to work complicated jigsaw puzzles. I hate them. I haven't got the patience. I suppose I have some level of ADD. Suzan will dump all those pieces onto the table, and it will look like a hot mess of paperboard and ink. Within a few hours, the mess will begin to take shape. It takes every single piece of that puzzle to produce the beautiful picture on the box. The longer I live, the more I see the bits and pieces of our journey being knit together to create a beautiful picture of God's grace. As you pursue your vision, God will let nothing go to waste. He will cause your desires, your skills, and your experiences to converge and create a picture of His faithfulness for the world to see.

Convergence takes time

A very odd thing happened around 1999. A minister I met through my new friends Bob Hahn and Rick Dawson invited our band *Neverthirst* to play at an outreach. Evangelist Denny Nissley had built a tractor-trailer rig that opened to a huge stage. The truck also boasted a massive sound system. It was designed for doing exactly what I had imagined when I visited Lancaster for the first time in 1992. What's even more incredible is where this event was to take place — Lancaster, PA! I had only visited Lancaster once in my life – to pray and fast in 1992. I knew no one in Lancaster. I didn't try to make this happen. Yet, I got to see pieces of my vision converge when we played to over 5000 people at a family festival only a short distance from where Suzan and I had stayed in seven-years earlier.

You will want to give up... don't.

By 2006, I was ready to let my idea of being a fulltime musicianary go. I was still working full time at a church, but I wasn't playing much music at all. I figured I was too old for such foolishness anyway. At 43 years old, the next logical step in ministry was to plant our own church. We spent a year planning and preparing to launch the new venture in Charlottesville, Virginia. I had all but given up on my vision. Furthermore, I was very close to selling off all of my music gear. Then, God sent a man across my path that would rock my world. Another *nevertheless* moment had arrived.

Jimmie Bratcher showed up at Lighthouse Worship Center and not only presented a model of exactly what I wanted to do, but he sold me his book *Don't Take Your Dreams to the Grave*. His story mirrored mine in many ways. He had been an associate pastor for years and thought that the next obvious step was to become a senior pastor. Then, he realized that wasn't his dream at all. He wanted to be a musicianary. And that's what he became. Twenty-four years later, the Lord used this man to rekindle my vision! It was as if He was saying, "Put the nets out one more time."

It would take another book to accurately describe the next five years. In short, we abandoned the church plant idea and I began to dream again. Though I could still see no way for my vision to become a reality, I could write songs, improve my craft and talk to my new friend Jimmie... a lot. I could also help him with his vision the best I could. Long story short, with Jimmie's constant counsel and the favor of God, my vision became a reality in 2011. It only took 29 years!

God will likely, as in my case, bring you to a few *nevertheless* moments. You may begin to doubt that your vision will ever come to pass. You may go through times of confusion, frustration, anger, and despair. You may be ready to give up completely on your vision. I encourage you to listen closely to the Master. Just when you're about to put your nets away, He may say, "Let's go fishin' one more time."

MAIN IDEAS:

- A passion-producing vision begins as an idea that becomes a conviction as you nurture it.
- Fulfilling a vision always requires wise counsel
- It takes time in the fire to shape a passion-producing vision
- Expect a nevertheless moment.
- Look for convergence as you shape your vision.
- You may want to give up.... don't.



6

MAINTAINING FOCUS ON A PASSION PRODUCING VISION

“I don’t care how much power, brilliance or energy you have, if you don’t harness it and focus it on a specific target, and hold it there you’re never going to accomplish as much as your ability warrants.”

– Zig Ziglar

FOCUS ON YOUR PPV DEMANDS DEFINITION

Remember, your vision is a vivid, detailed mental picture of what you'd rather have, do, and be. This again is hard work. Defining your vision specifically doesn't guarantee you will achieve or acquire everything you're after. However, not defining it is a recipe for the status quo. Write it down and make it plain.

And the LORD answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets..." Habakkuk 2:2 (ESV)

Specificity helps to communicate vision

A couple of years ago, Suzan and I realized that if we continued traveling as we do, we would need a newer, stronger RV. The one we were using was over 20 years old and had broken the 100,000-mile mark. It didn't have the storage, tow power or sleep capacity we needed for what we saw coming. We knew we needed to specify exactly what we were after.

Defining your vision not only helps you pray more specifically, but it also helps you articulate your vision to people who could help you.

We nailed down the exact type of RV we were going to believe God for — a Super C or C+. Now, understand, we didn't have a penny to invest in a new RV. Yet, the type of RV we chose to believe God for costs \$250,000 new! Even used ones sold for \$150,000 and up. Still, we made the effort to learn all we could about these RVs. We further refined our goal as the Jayco Seneca 36FS. After doing a little more research, we realized that the 36FS had a queen bed in the back but the 37FS had a king. We figured if we were going to believe God for the impossible, we might as well believe for a king bed. Thus, the Jayco Seneca 37FS became the focus of our vision for a new RV. I wrote in my journal:

“We are believing God for a late model Jayco Seneca 37FS with low miles. This RV has the towing power, sleep capacity and storage we need to do what we do well.”

You guessed it. I’m writing this book while sitting in our Jayco Seneca 37FS.

FOCUS ON YOUR PPV CALLS FOR CONSISTENT DAILY ACTION

To have an idea is one thing. Acting on an idea is another altogether. Action builds momentum. Action requires faith. If you’re going to achieve your vision and live in *thrival mode*, you will have to *act by faith*. There is always something you can do to move the ball down the field. Maybe it’s a call you need to make or an email you need to send. Maybe it’s a book you can read or a talent you need to develop. It may seem like these micro-steps aren’t getting you anywhere. However, small things like this move you forward a little at a time. They also help you keep your focus.

What I have found is that if I’ll do these little things by faith, the little things add up. My vision takes shape. Writing this book is an example. When I began, I had a rough outline. Then morning-by-morning, word-by-word, the outline produced a finished book. Through the process, I discovered that I didn’t always feel like writing in the morning. But if I would start, the words would come. A better example is how our RV story unfolded.

All the small things

Though we had no money toward a new RV, we could still take action. We could constantly search the internet to see what was out there. We could further investigate what owners had to say about these RVs. I even posted pictures of this model on my office wall. Beside the pictures I placed a printed scripture:

Now unto Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to His power at work within us. Ephesians 3:20 (ESV)

Every day, we focused on the vision for a new RV. We tried to find one to look at physically, but it seemed like they were always being sold in states far away from us. What other actions could I take? How else could I run with the vision? For one, I could let my friend Stan Grant know specifically what we were believing God for. Stan is that previously mentioned *new youth pastor* God once had me serve back in the '90s. He now pastors the most missions-minded church I know of. For the past several years, Clover Hill Church in Midlothian, Virginia has given over a million dollars to missionaries around the world.

I put together a photo presentation on my laptop demonstrating for Stan how we began Life on the Verge (at first, I stayed in a tent). My pictures showed the journey from our first ragged camper to the one we currently had. I used photos and videos from prison events to demonstrate the effectiveness of our ministry. I also gave him specific statistics on all we had done. Finally, I showed him the RV we were believing God for. He told me that the most the church could invest in our vision was \$10,000 but he couldn't guarantee that until he met with the board. "Praise God," I thought, "We're ten-thousand dollars closer than we were!"

In fact, the people of that church blessed our vision with \$41,500! Because we could articulate our vision clearly to others, even more came in from various individuals and churches. Furthermore, a wealthy business owner in the church agreed to match whatever we could raise. That's the same man that eventually wired me \$135,000 so we could buy the very first Jayco Seneca 37FS we ever set foot in. It was a 2015 model with only 13,000 miles on it. The whole process was covered in God's fingerprints. My point is this: *you must do what you can where you are with what you have.* You must define your vision clearly and act on what you can. Faith believes

that you will receive what you hope for even though your eyes can't see it. Faith without works is dead. What small step can you take today to bring more definition to your vision?

FOCUS ON YOUR PPV REQUIRES CONTROL OF YOUR EMOTIONS

Loads of things out there today will manipulate your emotions and cloud your thought life. The most valuable real estate you will ever own is the space between your ears. Keeping focus on your vision requires that you guard your mind against things that will get you off course. Proverbs 4:23 (NIV) warns:

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

The New Living Translation makes it even clearer:

Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.

The Hebrew word we translate as *heart* actually means the *mind*. We must guard our mind with all diligence because as a man thinks, so he is (Proverbs 23:7 KJV).

There are, of course, many things that can hijack your emotions and throw you off course. But here are three pretty common ones:

1. Social media

Like money, social media is a great servant but a terrible master. One post can stir up all sorts of negative emotions. Worse yet, because apps like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are designed to maximize eyeball time, it's easy to waste life's most precious commodity. After reading the books

Deep Work and *Digital Minimalism* by Cal Newport, I realized the great lengths Silicon Valley goes to in their efforts to make social media addictive. Smartphones, in general, can hijack our attention span and steal our capacity to focus on meaningful work. Therefore, we must be diligent on how we use these powerful tools.

2. Cable news

For a time, I was a cable news junky. I'd flip between FOX, CNN, MSNBC and sometimes One

America News. I wanted the conservative view, the liberal view, and the moderate view. One day, I realized that most of this *Breaking News* wasn't news at all. It was people giving me hour after hour of their opinion about the news. These folks know that since the dawn of time humans have had an appetite for negativity. So, they keep it coming 24-7-365. They intentionally manipulate our emotions to keep us tuned in. I still keep up with the headlines, but I haven't let the pundits hijack my focus for over a year now. I find it easier to remain positive and to stay focused on meaningful work.

3. Toxic people

There are some people you just can't help. Folks always backbiting, gossiping, complaining and bringing a bad report will steal your focus. If you feel led to influence these people, you can't altogether avoid them. But you can limit your exposure. In my case, I've had to unfollow quite a few people on social media. I may not want to completely unfriend them, but I need not entertain their negative drama every time I use Facebook either.

There are other forms of emotional kryptonite. It's up to you to determine which ones hijack your emotions. What people, places or things distract you by stirring up undesirable feelings? Eliminate or limit them and stay focused on your passion-producing vision.

FOCUS ON YOUR PPV COMMANDS CONTROL OF THE CLOCK

Time is the most valuable thing God has given us (beyond salvation, of course). Paul told us we are to make the most of time (Ephesians 5:16). Your vision will require a lot of it. Therefore, to keep your focus and move the ball down the field, you must control the clock. You must have a plan for your time or precious moments will be stolen on worthless pursuits.

Another book that influenced me tremendously is *Ordering Your Private World* by Gordon McDonald. My good friend Ken Cramer handed it to me in 1993 when I didn't think I had enough time to pursue my vision. My job as a crime scene investigator was very demanding. I was working long shifts that rotated every two weeks and my commute to work was over an hour — one way. Raising a family and taking care of a new house further contributed to the chaos. I felt like I had zero time to pursue anything else. Then I read Gordon's book. One topic he covers is time. He asserts

Unmanaged time comes under the influence of dominant people in my life

In other words: if you have no plan for your time, someone else does, hence, the importance of diligent scheduling.

Unmanaged time surrenders to everyone else's emergencies

Many emergencies aren't emergencies at all. Sometimes that *urgent crisis* was years in the making. It can't be solved overnight and therefore does not require my immediate attention.

Unmanaged time gets invested in easy applause

A great modern example of this is the dopamine-producing *like* button. We can think that because people are giving us a thumbs up we're making progress toward our vision. If it's a well thought out post that's part of your vision and it leads to clients or income that's different. But a cute post of what you're eating for dinner is just that — a cute post. Again, if you'd like to see just how crafty Mr. Zuckerberg is when it comes to manipulating

your time, read the books *Deep Work* and *Digital Minimalism* by Cal Newport.

Unmanaged time gets squandered on worthless pursuits

In his book *The Success Principles*, Jack Canfield (co-author of the Chicken Soup for the Soul books) relates how his mentor W. Clement Stone asked him how much time he spent watching TV. Canfield responded, “About three hours a night.” Stone gave him a sobering response. He told Canfield if he’d cut his TV time to two hours a night it would save 365 hours a year. Divide that by 40 and you’ll add nine and a half workweeks a year to focus on a worthwhile vision! Entertainment in any form must be carefully managed if we are to stay focused on our PPV.

MAIN IDEAS:

- **A passion-producing vision demands definition.**
- **A passion-producing vision calls for consistent daily action.**
- **Focus plus consistent effort equals progress.**
- **Focus on your vision requires control of your emotions.**
- **Focus on your vision commands control of the clock.**



7

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO A PASSION-PRODUCING VISION

“Comfort and prosperity have never enriched the world as much as adversity has.”

– Billy Graham

I've already mentioned some things that will steal your focus such as poor clock management and failing to control your emotions. The following are a few other obstacles I've encountered along the way.

INSECURITY WILL KEEP YOU FROM ACHIEVING YOUR PPV

I've heard insecurity described as *failing to be the person you think everyone else thinks you should be*. Insecurity will cause you to die with your music still in you. This is because we humans hate criticism. Let me just say, no one ever accomplished great things without vulnerability. You must put yourself out there despite insecurity.

Every time a professional baseball player goes to bat, he's aware that the odds of a strikeout are far greater than the odds of a home run. He also knows that he'll never put one over the fence without facing the pitcher. He must overcome feelings of insecurity and somehow stir up his confidence. He knows the bigger failure would be not trying.

Insecurity affects us all. No one wants to strike out or be booed. It's painful. We humans are wired to avoid pain. But if you will accomplish great things, you will have to face the pain head-on. Make up your mind. Are you going to swing for the fence? Then, you might experience some public humiliation occasionally. If you're too insecure to step up to the plate, you may as well crawl back to the stands and watch others do what you wish you had the guts to do.

In the words of Garth Brooks, "I could've missed the pain but I'd had to miss the dance."

FEAR OF FAILURE WILL KEEP YOU FROM ACHIEVING YOUR PPV

Failure in life is unavoidable. The best thing to do is to prepare your response to failure before it arrives. I'm not trying to be negative here, but you cannot grow and excel at something without fumbling a few times.

I've always been amazed at how professional athletes respond to failure. A great quarterback like Tom Brady can throw three interceptions in the first half of a game and draw a chorus of boos from his hometown crowd (plus millions watching on TV). Then, in the second half, he can turn around and come back for a win. I've studied these guys. The question they often ask after a bad play is this: "What's important now?" It's almost as if they plan their response to failure ahead of time.

I do this in my own life. When my wife and I are about to take a risk that could fail, we count the cost. We visit failure. We imagine the emotions we might experience and the consequences we must face if the very worst happens. Most times, the worst never happens. But if it does, we have prepared our minds and hearts ahead of time. If the potential pain is too catastrophic, we don't take the risk.

Another great book to consider along these lines is *Failing Forward* by John Maxwell. He contends that all great men and women fail. Failure is what makes them great. Champions realize that if they learn from their failures and persist in their endeavors, the same people that booed them will end up applauding them. Don't let a fear of failure keep you from taking well thought out risks. You will never accomplish your vision without some level of failure. The greatest failure is to die without trying.

IGNORANCE WILL KEEP YOU FROM ACHIEVING YOUR PPV

Another obstacle to accomplishing your vision is simply a lack of knowledge. Proverbs warns,

Desire without knowledge is not good-- how much more will hasty feet miss the way! Proverbs 19:2 (NIV)

This is why we need the Word of God and mentors. What we don't know can hurt us. We live in the information age. What you must know to accomplish your vision is out there. You just need to ask the right questions.

Have you ever thought, "Man, I wish I would've known then what I know now?" Well, the information was available back then. You just didn't seek it out. Do the hard yards. Investigate every aspect you can about your vision and goals.

We all need mentors

Asking the right questions about your vision is a critical key to success. For example, one of the best questions you can ask a mentor is this: "Knowing what you know now, how would you have done things differently?" The best way to learn from failure is by someone else's failure not your own.

About mentors, I've had many. Sometimes I found them in books, or audio recordings or videos. But several times, I've prayed them into my life. For instance, there was a time when I got too cocky. I had a *heard it all, know it all* complex. I knew this was stunting my growth. I also knew that no one grows into their potential without a coach pushing them beyond their norms. So, I asked God to bring someone into my life that would come down on me in a good way. God answered that prayer. He sent a leader across my path that would stretch me in every way. He challenged my insecurities like no one before or since. Sometimes, I despised him, but I knew he was an answer to prayer. I thank God for this man and the five years of pressure he put on me. I became a bigger thinker and much more secure in my calling. I also learned a lot about what I didn't want.

The knowledge you need to fulfill your vision is out there. Don't let ignorance be an excuse for inaction or failed action. Do whatever it takes to learn all you can about what you're trying to accomplish.

LACK OF REST WILL KEEP YOU FROM ACHIEVING YOUR PPV

I once heard a great sermon on seasons of expansion and contraction — *there is no growth without both*. Even your muscles need these two seasons to grow. Some of us can get so consumed by our vision that we never take time to rest or celebrate the wins. There comes a time when our efforts start to produce diminishing returns. I think this was God's purpose in giving us a Sabbath day. A day of rest is often the hardest day of the week for me. It really can be an act of faith.

Recently, I took to running six days a week. I've been a runner on and off for most of my adult life. I don't run marathons and have no desire to do so. I run so I can eat what I want and not be obese. My favorite part of running is when it's over. But I recently wanted to drop a few pounds and my six-day regiment always works. I started this up again while in Florida during July and August. The climate was not my friend. After a couple of weeks, I saw my runtimes drop from jogging 3.2 miles in 30 minutes to barely hitting 2.5 miles in a half-hour. I was feeling exhausted. So, I took two days in a row off to recharge. The results were exactly what I expected. My energy returned and my run times improved.

For your vision to succeed you must make time to *re-create* and enjoy solitude. There must be seasons of expansion and contraction. Make rest and leisure a part of your schedule. Plan your time off first. It's that important.

BEING MANIPULATED BY YOUR PAST WILL KEEP YOU FROM YOUR VISION

Your past is a great teacher but a horrible master. The past should only be used as a platform for reaching your future.

We minister in a lot of prisons where the past is a major obstacle for many inmates. They cannot break the cycle of condemnation. We encourage them with the word of the Lord that tells us there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We tell them that condemnation is never from the Lord (Romans 8:1). He is a good Father. He may convict us of things that could be detrimental to our success, but He did not send His son to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:17).

Maybe you have deep wounds from the past. You must work through those issues. Let Jesus turn your wounds into weapons. Isn't it amazing how our greatest contributions can come from where we've been cut the deepest? I once heard a preacher named Bob Rhoden say, "Through brokenness comes authority." That place where you've experienced failure, heartbreak or abuse is the place where you have the greatest authority.

When I say the past, I don't just mean terrible things that happened to you as a child, or your business that went bust, or the embarrassing divorce scandal you endured. I mean every day, every moment kind of past too. The adversary, Satan, is called the accuser for a reason. He'll take that negative thing you just said to your spouse to make you feel unworthy of God's blessing for the whole day. He'll try to convince you that the sinful habit you're struggling with negates God's favor on your life. That's all a pack of lies. You are not saved because you do not sin or fail. You are saved because you believe on Jesus. Biblical faith believes that Jesus saves you and chooses to use you despite your *struggle* with sin.

Here's how ridiculous I used to be: The Bible says, "The mercies of the Lord are new every morning." I used to think if I fell into an old sinful habit in the middle of a day, I could look forward to new mercy in the morning. I'd find myself almost writing off the rest of the day as far as God's blessing is concerned. Yes, there is new mercy in the morning, but there's grace for every moment too. Don't let the ancient past or recent history keep you from recognizing God has saved you, called you and takes joy in your faith when you pursue a noble vision. He's not counting on you being perfect. That's why He sent His son.

BEING A SLACKER WILL KEEP YOU FROM YOUR VISION

I've told you to stay in the Proverbs. This is because they will often give you a holy smackdown. They'll remind you that:

All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads to poverty. Proverbs 14:23 (NIV)

They'll tell you to go look at the ants that have no master bossing them around, yet they stay busy and get the job done. The Proverbs will warn you to not be like the guy who uses fear of "a lion in the streets" as a reason for not doing what needs to be done. Another favorite is where the Proverbs address what is commonly known as doing something half-assed:

A sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth. Proverbs 26:15 (NIV)

I love the Berean Version. It says, "the slacker" instead of "a sluggard."

Ed Mylett is one of my favorite podcasters. He talks about the *one more principle*. He says that whatever he does, he always tries to do one more. If he's working out, he goes one more rep beyond what was planned. If he

sets a goal of making 10 phone calls in a day, he pushes beyond and makes 11. It's a good principle to follow. Most of the time, when we think we're working hard, there's still room to push.

A couple of times in my life I've had to drop 40-50 pounds (shame on me for gaining that extra weight). I know this: it doesn't come off overnight and it doesn't come off easy! So, let me tell you how simple it is for me to drop that kind of weight:

1. I can eat whatever I want but never exceed 1500 calories in a day.
2. I must run 30 minutes a day six days a week in the rain, snow, sleet or heat for about six months.

Piece of cake, right?

You will never achieve your vision without serious intention and consistency over a long period. To accomplish your vision, you will have to work harder than you've ever worked before. Most of us have worked 40 plus hours a week for someone else's vision. Are you willing to work that hard for your own vision? Don't ask God to make things easier. Ask Him to make you better.

MAIN IDEAS:

- **Insecurity will keep you from achieving your vision.**
- **Fear of failure will keep you from achieving your vision.**
- **Ignorance will keep you from achieving your vision.**
- **Lack of rest will keep you from achieving your vision.**
- **Being a slacker will keep you from achieving your vision.**
- **Don't ask God to make things easier, ask Him to make you better.**



8

NAVIGATING THE RISK OF A PASSION-PRODUCING VISION

“If you want a guarantee, buy a toaster.”

– Clint Eastwood

You will never achieve your vision without risk. There will be small risks along the way, but then there may also be a few really big ones. Risk requires that you put yourself out there. You make yourself vulnerable. Failure and complete embarrassment become real possibilities. In those times hearing the voice of God is vital.

THE FIVE VOICES OF GOD

Anyone who has watched Suzan and I do life from a distance might think we've been reckless. This is far from the truth. I think we've been too careful at times. That's because I've got a massive ego that doesn't like to look foolish. Pride and risk don't always mix well. Nevertheless, we have had to take some pretty big risks along the way. In those times, I desperately want to hear God's voice. I rarely wait for Him to tell me what to do. Rather, we carefully make our plans and take action while listening for God to redirect us or stop us if we've made a bad decision. Some of this may look familiar from earlier in the book. But here's what we call the Five Voices of God. It's a template we employ when making risky moves:

The voice of God's Word: What is God saying through scripture?

This is the gold standard. Our decision must be in line with scripture. We not only look for general guidelines, but we also ask ourselves if any particular verse or scriptural theme seems to be developing.

The voice of godly counsel: What is God saying through those who believe in us?

We all have blind spots. Sometimes God sends a man or woman across our path to help us see them. We know it is foolish to make plans without counsel. So, we look to those who love us to help us see every angle of a risk.

The voice of desire: What's happening in us?

I've already written about this. If you are living to please God you will not have a vision to do something illegal, immoral or unbiblical. He will cause

you to desire the things he created you to accomplish. We ask ourselves, “Is this really what we want?”

The voice of Providential circumstance: What’s happening around us?

Sometimes it’s a prophetic word, a dream or something that may look like a coincidence. It could also be an opportunity that seems too good to be true. The keyword there is *seems*. We never lean on this one too hard because it’s so subjective.

The voice of peace: Do we have the peace of the Holy Spirit about this risk?

This is a big one. Even if everything is pointing toward taking the risk, we listen for the whistle. Colossians 3:15 (NIV) says, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...” The word *rule* in the original Greek means *to act as an umpire*. My philosophy is to start moving but listen for the whistle. No matter how strongly we have felt or how favorably the circumstances may be pointing to a decision — we keep it before the Lord at all times. There have been a few instances where the peace lifted at the very last minute. Because we were listening and still willing to abandon our plans, God kept us from making a bad move.

I’d like to say we’ve done all things well and never made a bad decision. I can’t. We have made a few foolish choices — usually out of haste. I can say, however, that when it comes to making the big decisions, God has kept us from falling. This is because we always permit Him to correct our course.

The big D-Day

On June 6, 1944, the Allied forces invaded northern France with beach landings in Normandy. Most historians would say this turned the course of World War II and brought an end to the atrocities of Adolph Hitler. Though it resulted in thousands of lives being lost, the risk was worth the payoff. There will come a day in pursuing your passion-producing vision you will have to decide if the risk is worth the payoff.

Our D-Day came in 2006 when God sent a man across my path to rekindle my vision of being a musicianary. After a year of planning a church plant in Charlottesville, Virginia, it was as if God was reminding me not to give up on my dream of playing music for a living. The decision to abandon the church plant idea left me unemployed and without health insurance. It was the first time I had been without a job since I started working full time at 16 years old. It was a trying time for sure, but we knew it would be wrong to start a new church when we had a vision to do something else down the road.

Eventually, I took a position at a large church in Virginia Beach. There, I served another man's vision for five more years before God allowed us to take an even bigger risk. That decision would again cost me my job and medical insurance. It would also require that we move into a beat-up old camper full time to cut our budget. It was a small price to pay when I think about the many men and women in prison we have been able to perform for and minister to over the past eight years. That seemingly foolish risk also gave our son a place to escape to when he found himself struggling with destructive vices. Matt traveled with us for over two years playing his original music only to inmates and bikers. When he told me he wanted to play music for a living, I told him, "Matt, if God wants that for your life you will know He made it happen. Otherwise, that lifestyle can destroy you." He came off the road a few months later and recorded two songs in a friend's bedroom studio. He put those songs on Soundcloud and within weeks he was auditioning for several major record labels. He eventually signed with Neon Gold/Atlantic Records and became known as *Matt Mason*. His single *Cringe* held the #1 spot on the Billboard Alternative Song Chart for four weeks during the fall of 2019. He's currently selling out medium-sized venues across the country. For Father's Day 2018, he invited me to play guitar with his band at some of the nation's biggest rock festivals – Bonnaroo, Lollapalooza, Sloss, and Forecastle. It was surreal. On June 23, 2019, Suzan and I joined Matt at NBC Studios in New York for his

performance on *Late Night with Seth Meyers*. I was literally shooting spoof videos on the set of *Saturday Night Live*.

Friends, we are not enamored by any of this. Rather, we are humbled at the grace of God. We know none of it happened by conventional means. We don't control the miracles. It has all flowed from pursuing a passion-producing vision that advances the kingdom. The payoff has far exceeded the cost of the risk.

Making a case for risk

The topic of making big decisions and taking big risks is deep enough to warrant another book. In short, here are a few questions that have helped my wife and me through the valley of decision:

1. What are the five voices of God saying (see the above section)?
2. Can I write a lengthy formal proposal to myself justifying why this risk is worth taking?
3. Are my wife and I in total agreement?
4. Would the regret of not taking the risk outweigh the pain of failure?
5. What is our action plan if the worst happens?

Our X-Factor

As believers, our X-factor is the indwelling Holy Spirit. Sometimes, everything has pointed to taking a risk, but at the last minute, we heard the whistle. The great umpire was letting us know we were stepping out of bounds. The key is that no matter how great an opportunity looks, we must always leave room for God to say no – even at the last minute. Remember, our goal is to discover the works He prepared in advance for us to do. We don't define success in worldly terms. Success is when you know that you are doing the things God designed you to do.

MAIN IDEAS:

- **God speaks through His Word, counsel, desire, circumstances and His peace.**
- **A risk is only worth taking if the regret of not taking it is greater than the pain of failure.**
- **Writing a formal proposal helps provide convincing evidence for or against a risk.**
- **Big risks bring both – the potential for great success or great failure.**
- **Our X-factor is the indwelling Holy Spirit.**
- **Success is when you know you are doing what God created you to do.**



9

THE NECESSITY OF VISION

“Love, and do what you like”

- St. Augustine

THE WORLD NEEDS YOUR VISION

More than ever this world needs godly men and women to dream big dreams. Our purpose for being here is to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world and a city on a hill. Kingdom carrying believers should be impacting and influencing every sphere of society. We're not here to just get by. We're here to make a difference.

Developing a God-glorifying vision is hard work. Most people aren't willing to do that work. Many just accept where they are in life. They don't realize they are only trapped by their unwillingness to dream and trust God. They are just surviving. They aren't living in *thrival mode*. They aren't teeming with life and passion or facing each day with intense desire and enthusiasm. These kinds of folks seem to think opportunity will just come knocking on the door someday or God might write on a wall with His finger exactly what they are supposed to do. For most of us, God will not show up in a burning bush and commission us with a great task. He has already given us enough to work with. Consider again the Proverbs:

The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord. Proverbs 21:31 (NIV)

Who makes the horse ready for battle? We have a role to play. We have work to do. Part of that work is developing a God-glorifying vision. Your vision will give you a platform by which the world will see God at work. As you walk out your vision, seeds will be planted, and fruit will grow in places you won't see in this life. Let me give you an example.

I don't see myself as a Christian musician. My vision is about being a competent musician that happens to be a follower of Jesus. In my psyche, there's a big difference there. Would a carpenter call him or herself a Christian carpenter? Would they only build churches? Of course not! Thus, I take the tools of my trade wherever they can be put to work. When I'm not

on the road or in prison, I sit in with various local bar bands occasionally. I don't show up to preach a sermon. I show up to jam. Over the past ten years or so, many local musicians have gradually discovered who we are and what we do in ministry. I don't try to hide the fact that I'm a minister of the gospel. I don't flaunt it either. My fellow musicians respect that I don't preach at them or operate with some hidden agenda to save their souls. I show up to be their friend and offer my service. Don't get me wrong. I'm always ready to have a spiritual conversation if the Holy Spirit opens the door. However, it is remarkable how many times these folks have come back years later to tell me how our life and ministry has spoken to them.

You and I can save no one. We can only walk out the vision God has given us. But remember, wherever we go, He goes. If you live life in survival mode — never advancing, never growing and never prospering — you limit the world's exposure to Christ in you. Conversely, as you boldly and passionately take new ground with your vision, more people will see your good deeds and God will be glorified.

GOD EXPECTS US TO HAVE VISION

In Matthew 25:14-30 Jesus tells a parable of a wealthy master who entrusts three servants with his money — according to their ability. Then, the master goes away for a long time. He expects that the servants will put the money to work and gain a profit. Two of the servants doubled their master's money. The third servant buried the master's money in the ground. He earned no increase. Although the servant with the one talent didn't lose what was entrusted to him, he also didn't put it to work. The result was that the master called him wicked and lazy. That one talent was taken away from him and given to the others who would put it to work. Here's the key thing I want you to get from that parable regarding vision: *after the master left town there was no more communication.* The servants couldn't call him to ask specifics. They couldn't send him a quick text or email to get more

information. They simply had to act on what they knew the master desired. They had to develop a vision to fulfill the master's expectation. While I firmly believe we can communicate with our Master and that He speaks to us, I think the point Jesus was trying to make was this – get busy doing all you can with what you have where you are!

VISION QUESTIONS THAT DEMAND AN ANSWER

Previously, I told you that I've always been amazed at the resilience of professional athletes. That curiosity led me to a book titled, *Elite Minds: Creating the Competitive Advantage* by Stan Beecham. He is a psychologist and athletic performance consultant. In the book, he mentions that the question, "What do you want in life?" is better answered by breaking the inquiry into three more specific questions. Here are the three questions and my comments regarding them:

1. What do you want to *have* in life?
2. What do you want to *do* in life?
3. Who do you want to *be* in life?

What you want to have in life is about possessions. If your vision is to have a mansion on a hill and drive a Rolls Royce, there's nothing inherently wrong about that — unless you're doing something that you don't want to do. Putting the *have* in front of the *do* is a fatal mistake in priority that traps many in misery.

What you want to do in life speaks to your vocation. Many people work jobs they hate just to have nice things. I learned long ago that's a bad deal. I'd much rather get up every day excited about what I get to do than to work a job I tolerate for the sake of stuff. Material things will never be worth more than my time. Therefore, my vision for what I want to *do* is far more important than my vision for what I want to *have*.

Who do you want to be in life is a character question. Here's the real starting point of a passion-producing vision. I told you that many people view Life on the Verge as a prison ministry. Some call it a musicianary ministry. Many people appreciate what we do and we love what we do. But I don't want to ultimately be known for my vocational accomplishments. I hope that people will be inspired by our faith — starting with my own children. Who do I want to *be*? I want to be a loving husband and father faithfully leading my family to trust God more than they trust me. I want to be a man that advances the kingdom of God through a passion-producing vision.

Do yourself a favor as you explore this concept of vision. Drill down on these three questions. Just do a brain dump. Then compare notes with your spouse if you're married. Or, discuss them with your business partner or ministry team if applicable. Get on the same page as you craft a passion-producing vision.

A PASSION-PRODUCING VISION IS THE KEY TO LIVING IN THRIVAL MODE

Friend, I have written this book hoping to convince you to trust God more. I don't want you to waste away your years in survival mode. I want you to live in *thrival mode*. I believe this is the desire of God for His children. I believe he wants you to live each day with intense desire and enthusiasm; to live by faith believing the best is yet to come. Developing this passion for living requires putting the power of vision to work. You must dream of what could be, should be and must be. Without vision, you will contract Passion Deficit Disorder. You will stagnate and perish. You will trade God's precious gift of time for a mediocre existence. I can assure you; this is not the will of your loving Father.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This would perhaps be the longest and most difficult part of this book if I chose to start naming names. There are so many who have contributed their encouragement, counsel and hard-earned money to help us with our vision through the years. You know who you are. You're the ones who gave to our first album project in 90's. You're the ones who gave us opportunities in ministry. You're the ones who have served our ministry. You're the ones who have helped us with transportation, lodging and even food. You're the ones who spend hours on the phone with me as I try to navigate next steps. You're the ones who scratch out a check each month to keep Life on the Verge in prison and on the road today. I want so badly to write out a list of names but I'm sure I'd leave somebody off. Just know that God knows. He has written your name down and He won't leave anyone off. Of course, I have to acknowledge my incredible wife Suzan by name; and my kids Kendall, Brittney and Matthew. They lived this book. Furthermore, none of this would have ever come to be if it weren't for my praying Momma and Granny.

Train up a child in the way he should go and when he old he will not depart from it. Proverbs 22:6

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