

## **Kingdom Vision: Kingdom Values (#1)**

Summarized and posted by Bob Young

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*[Note: this file contains three articles; each begins at the top of a page.]*

I recently read a book by Sherwood Lingenfelter (*Leading Cross-Culturally*)<sup>1</sup> that provides a fresh look at leadership. The book begins with a reminder of the importance of having a solid foundation of kingdom vision and kingdom values upon which to build effective leadership. Lingenfelter urges his readers to examine vision and values in terms of the cultural boundaries that are often unseen and not considered. Most of what follows in this essay is taken directly from that book, including specific lists and observations. Along the way, I have also summarized and added a few of my own comments.

In brief, the book suggests that cross-cultural leadership (and all leadership) demands the following elements: inspiring people toward a compelling vision, building relationships and communities of trust, and empowering and mentoring people. *“Leading cross-culturally is inspiring people who come from two or more cultural traditions to participate with you in building a community of trust, and then to follow you and be empowered by you to achieve a compelling vision of faith.”*

Leadership must be distinguished from management. Managers work toward goals by organizing activities and putting people in slots. If something is not working, managers tweak either programs or staffing. On the other hand, leadership is a process which aligns people by translating vision and values into understandable and attainable actions. In connecting vision and values with strategic actions, leaders continually remind of the vision, help develop supportive relationships of trust and support, and empower and mentor those they lead. Paul is describing leadership when he says church leaders equip others for service (Eph. 4:11-13).

While leadership involves vision, setting direction, monitoring, motivating, and inspiring, the typical business version of leadership is still lacking for Christian ministry and mission. Since Jesus was a leader, to study the leadership of Jesus provides helpful insights. Lingenfelter notes the following: (1) Jesus built trust within a relational community, (2) Jesus defined a compelling vision for life, (3) Jesus led by being out in front, (4) Jesus called others to follow him, and (5) Jesus empowered those who followed.

This essay focuses on only one element of the definition Lingenfelter gives—inspiring people to achieve a compelling vision. This is sometimes described as the goal (or goals), the vision, the mission, or the purpose. These are related but different. Purpose asks “why an organization exists.” Asked another way, purpose is about what the organization is supposed to do. Vision asks, “What will the organization look like when it gets where it is going?” Vision addresses the question of becoming fully-functional to accomplish the purpose; thus vision describes the organization at its optimum. Mission suggests movement or direction, and is sometimes used to

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<sup>1</sup> Sherwood G. Lingenfelter. *Leading Cross-Culturally: Covenant Relationships for Effective Christian Leadership*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008. Lingenfelter is provost and senior vice-president at Fuller Theological Seminary.

address the “how” of the organization—how will the organization reach its goals? Other times the question, “What is our mission?” is used to ask about purpose. This inconsistent use of the concept of mission (sometimes referring to purpose and sometimes to strategies) is often confusing. Mission at its root involves “sent-ness” and can be defined by determining “why” one is sent or by determining “what one is sent to do”. Goal may define the ultimate end, but goals may also be strategies, as when we speak of short-term, medium-range, or long-term goals. The use of the word “goals” faces some of the same dilemma as the use of the word “mission”. The variety with which these words are used has made communication difficult when an organization tries to address the development of vision (or the development of a Kingdom Vision by the church). Each word must be carefully defined according to the specific way the words will be used in a given setting.<sup>2</sup>

### **What is Kingdom Vision?**

The phrase, “kingdom vision” may refer to a vision consistent with the kingdom or a vision for the kingdom. Jesus began his ministry by describing the presence of the kingdom (Luke 4:14-21, 31-32). To develop a kingdom vision requires that one understand what the Bible teaches about the kingdom of God, and that one embrace the vision that flows out of that teaching to establish the kingdom on earth and in eternity, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of Matthew articulates the vision in a different way (Matt. 4:23-5:3; 9:35-38). The text of Matthew also reports how four fishermen caught the vision and left their work to follow Jesus (4:18-20).

While the Bible is essential to defining the kingdom vision (whatever vision one identifies for the Kingdom cannot be inconsistent with Scripture), the vision must be tested and confirmed by the community, refined by the community’s involvement in shaping or reshaping the vision, and actualized by the mobilization of the body in prayer and action. Once people commit to the mission and vision, they begin kingdom work. Commitment to the mission and vision implies activity consistent with the mission and vision. When the church is genuinely involved in the kingdom, the vision is God’s, the mission is God’s, and the work is God’s.

### **Kingdom Leadership**

God gives gifts to some of his people to call others to serve. People hear the call to serve through (1) a deep conviction, (2) a sense of urgency, (3) a special text or story from the Bible, (4) a willingness to step out of the normal routines of life, and (5) a commitment to follow Jesus in his work.

Leading others to a kingdom vision requires an understanding of the work God can use to accomplish the mission and to make the vision reality. A vision should give joy and a refreshment of spirit. A vision for the future is not built on problems to be solved or issues to be addressed. A list of items that need attention does not fuel a vision or mission. Lists tend to call for doing more, doing better, and more of the same. Most lists are joyless, duty bound, and

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<sup>2</sup> In this study, Vision provides the overarching definition of what the functioning organization looks like at its optimum. Purpose is the reason for the organization. Mission is used parallel to Purpose. The question, “What is the Mission?” is the same basic question as, “What is the purpose?” The concept of goals will not be used synonymously with vision (the goal), but rather to refer to strategies. In fact, this author attempts to limit references to the goal or the goals, due to the possible double meaning of the words. As an alternative, we will talk about Vision, Mission, and strategies or action steps.

focused on human efforts. Lists tend toward moralizing, i.e. you should, you must, you need to.... A vision for God leads us to dependence on God and not self. It puts problems and issues in perspective.

### **A “Missions” Example**

In pondering the concept of a kingdom vision, I have specifically thought about the mission works I am involved with, especially in Latin America. *“What would we have to do by 2025 to have a viable, valid voice and presence throughout Latin America?”* This question contains the basic elements: mission, vision, actions. What would we have to do (actions), if we were to see our purpose or mission as having a voice throughout Latin America, and if we were to define the vision of the organizations or churches consistent with that mission? While the specifics of the mission must be further defined and the vision developed, the process can begin with the question raised. The actions (goals, strategies) would of course be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. Such a question seeks to define core purpose and values.

### **A Church Example**

What is God’s vision for the local church? What would we have to do (goals, actions, or strategies to be determined)...to fulfill this purpose or mission (mission to be defined)...and to make the local church look like this (vision to be fleshed out)? Individual leaders or Christians can begin the visioning process by working with this question template, remembering that the vision is ultimately confirmed by the church, shaped or reshaped by the church, and accomplished by the church. This understanding avoids the problem of leaders or members talking about “my vision” as different than “his vision” or “her vision.” The vision is God’s, identified, adopted, and fulfilled by the local church or mission organization.

### **Leading toward a Kingdom Vision**

Recall the components of our definition: a compelling vision, accomplished by a community of trust, faith, and prayer, through the empowering and mentoring of the members of the community. Without vision, the community loses its sense of mission—purpose and direction. Without mission, the community loses the meaning and intent of its activities. Without a reason for action, the community loses its commitment, and eventually its life.

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## **Kingdom Vision: Kingdom Values (#2)**

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What values do you bring to kingdom work? Which of those values are cultural, and which are biblical? Typical values concern priorities, schedules, desired processes and methods, relationships, routines, and the use of resources. People frequently have disagreements about these things, and in multicultural settings, such disagreements about core values can be substantive.

An example of the contrasts can be seen in a questionnaire that was given to two different cultural groups that were considering working together in partnership. The participants were separated by their cultural backgrounds—U.S. participants and indigenous participants. When asked to define the nature of partnerships, to describe desirable character qualities of those involved in a partnership, and to suggest what they would give to others in the partnership relationship, the answers from the two groups varied widely. The U.S. participants defined the partnership according to tasks and results; sought character qualities such as reliability, humility, commitment, and work ethic; and committed to provide training, money, facilitation, critical feedback—all reflecting a superior/inferior relationship. The indigenous participants defined the partnership as a relational ministry; sought character qualities such as love, God’s calling, generosity, and high social values; and committed to provide people, relationships and spiritual resources, in the context of shared/complementary relationships.

Both groups were giving greater priority to their cultural values for working relationships than to kingdom values. Jesus is quite clear about the values he expects of those who would follow him in kingdom work. The essential quality is reflected in Luke 9:23-24: self-denial. This reflects core kingdom values such as serving others, relinquishing control, and submission. The value typically placed on achievement gives way to the priority of trusting God for all outcomes. Typical cultural values extend “un-grace” to others. Kingdom values show the illogic of grace.

### **Illustration: What Does One Get for Kingdom Work?**

In the text of Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus tells the story of the landowner who hires men to work in his vineyard. The text is an answer to Peter’s question of 19:27. The text follows immediately after the encounter with the rich young ruler. Jesus addresses a series of “human questions” about work and reward.

What will I get for my labor? (19:27)

Why don’t I get more? (20:11)

What is fair? (20:12)

In view of our willing to make a greater sacrifice, will you give us more than the rest? (20:21-22)

People want to know what they are going to get for their participation in the kingdom. This is often a source of conflict. One can easily illustrate the application of these questions in a mission context as well as in the local church context. Jesus answers the questions.

We have left all—what will there be for us (19:28-30)? Jesus' response is that while they have left everything, they have left nothing. One cannot out-give God. There will be future abundance and even position (19:30).

Why don't we get more? Cross-cultural understandings often get in the way and are frustrating. Workaholic Westerners wonder why non-Western workers don't work as hard as they do. Such may be critical of work habits, see their own work habits as better. We easily forget that the measure may be turned against us (Matt. 7:1-3).

What about fairness? The landowner responds in the story that he has done what he promised. The point is that God is generous to all, regardless of our performance, ability or inability to perform.

What will we get? Jesus asks, do you want what I am going to get? Their affirmative response belies their misunderstanding. Jesus is challenging their basic values. He came to serve and to give his life (20:26-28).

In summary, Jesus makes the following points that demonstrate a differing set of values to be applied to kingdom work.

He calls many diverse people to work (20:3-6)

He pays "whatever is right" (20:4)

He is generous but not "fair" (20:13-15)

He gives "a hundred times as much" (19:29)

He gives "his life as a ransom for many" (20:28)

Perhaps it is sufficient to observe that these values contradict most of the cultural values we have adopted for the work of God.

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### **Kingdom Vision: Kingdom Values (#3)**

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What keeps us from fulfilling God's vision, from reaching our aspirations as God's servants, from serving as leaders in the situations God provides, from extending God's healing reign into our broken world?

God gives us inadequate people. As a part of adopting kingdom values, we must learn that God loves weak people and intends his leaders to work with the people he provides to help all mature in Christ and become faithful disciples. The prayer of Jesus in John 17 is challenging (17:9-10, 12, 15). Can you see that Jesus valued each of the disciples God had given him, and was rejoicing that none had been lost? Certainly they were an inadequate group of followers, plagued with problems.

Our values are constantly eroding. What are you doing to renew your values? Since values are constantly under attack and our commitment to them weakens even as the values are questioned or lost, we must as leaders consider how to renew our sense of mission, restore our vision, renew the values, and reinvigorate our activities. We must give repeated attention to the mission, vision, and values essential for kingdom work. The pressures of daily work soon blur our commitment to that which is larger than we are.

The great need in leadership is to see the cross as a defining metaphor of leadership. Leaders who learn how to lose themselves and to deny themselves lead by example and find greater effectiveness as they walk in the footsteps of Jesus, our Leader. Worship centered on the cross is the motivation for change which God provides to kingdom people.