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The Art of Vision Casting for Church Multiplication

J.D. Payne

“A plan in the heart of man is like deep water, but a man of understanding draws it out.” Proverbs 20:5 (NASB).

The writer of the above verse reminds us of the importance of having knowledge in regard to moving one’s plans out of the deep recesses of the heart to the surface to where those plans can be carried out. This proverb has much to say about casting a vision for multiplication. Casting, or drawing out that vision from the heart so that others will take ownership of that vision and work to carry it out, requires a discerning mind, a person of understanding.

The concept of vision is prevalent throughout the Scriptures. Abraham carried within himself the vision of land and a multitude of descendents. For years, Moses led the Children with the vision of the Promise Land in mind. Joshua advanced his army with a vision in mind. Nehemiah’s vision for the rebuilding of the wall permeates the book that bears his name. Jonah’s vision of God’s grace resulted in the hardening of his heart toward the people of Nineveh. The magi traveled for miles with the vision in mind of a new King. The Son went to the cross with the Father’s vision in his heart. The Apostle Paul was willing to become all things to all peoples to see the fulfillment of a vision. The Apostle Peter stayed with Gentiles with a vision of what God would do in the house of Cornelius. The Church continues on mission with the vision of the New Jerusalem in mind.

Aubrey Malphurs wrote, “Clearly vision is of utmost importance to leaders and their ministry.”¹ Malphurs continued on to note that there are at least seven reasons as to why vision is critical to any ministry.² First, a vision encourages unity. Vision unites the people around God’s leadership. Second, a vision creates energy. It can move people from stagnancy to mission.

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Third, a vision provides purpose. It assists people in recognizing that they are a part of something significant. Fourth, a vision fosters risk-taking. The fulfillment of a vision requires action, something must be done. Fifth, a vision enhances leadership. Those who cast the vision are then held accountable before the people and must remain consistent in moving toward the vision. Sixth, a vision promotes excellence. A vision does not permit laziness and sloppy work. Finally, a vision sustains ministry. Since ministry is difficult, returning to a God-given vision can keep the church focus and moving forward.

Casting vision for multiplication is the ability to paint both prayerfully and patiently a picture of: 1) what the Spirit has shown to be a multiplicative-growth possibility with churches both historically and in contemporary societies, and 2) what the Spirit can do working through your church to plant other multiplying churches.³ On the one hand, the picture must be painted with enough detail that your church will be attracted to the vision and motivated to minister to carry out that vision; but on the other hand, the picture must be broad enough to allow for the flexibility and creativity of the Spirit to work as He sovereignly desires through the gifts, talents, personalities, and abilities of His people.

Still Life, Kandinsky, and Monet

Casting a vision is about future possibilities. Casting a vision is more art than science. The vision caster paints a mental (unseen) picture for a group of believers that will help them see the heart and power of the Holy Spirit as well as how they can fit into the Lord's plan for the advancement of the Kingdom. Continuing with the painting analogy, rather than attempting to paint certain still life portraits or an abstract work such as a Kandinsky, I tend to think of vision casting for multiplication as painting an impressionistic work, such as a Monet.

On the one hand, many still life paintings reveal a variety of details related to their subjects. A bowl of fruit is clearly seen as a detailed bowl of fruit. A highly detailed vision (still life picture), however, cast before people will not motivate some people because the details that are described to them may be the details that do not appeal to them. We tend to focus on the details that we prefer due to our gifts, talents, interests, educational level, abilities, and desires and omit other "less" significant details, thus, turning some away.

On the other hand, an abstract work such as a Kandinsky, leaves the observer with a variety of colors, geometric shapes, and lines jumbled across a canvass in what appears to be some

type of chaos. In casting a vision for multiplication one does not want to paint an abstract work in which only the vision caster knows what the picture looks like, and the observers are generally left guessing, or interpreting the vision according to their hunches and guesses.

Think of vision casting as analogous to the artistic movement known as Impressionism. In an impressionistic style, an artist such as Monet used a variety of brushstrokes that captured scenes with only enough detail to offer the observer an "impression" of what was being painted. The trees and water lilies were easily observed as "trees" and "water lilies," but upon detailed inspection, the objects appeared to be just odd brushstrokes and smudges of paint on a canvas. This style of painting allowed for the picture to be completed in the minds of the observers by stimulating the observers' personalities and interests to fill in the details.

A Picture of Possibilities

Vision casting for multiplication paints a picture of possibilities that can occur, by God's grace. Vision casting for multiplication allows each member of the church, with their diversity of gifts, personalities, interests, and talents to "see" where they can fit in and be a part of carrying out the vision. Effective vision casting causes people to say, "Yes, by the power of the Holy Spirit, I can see our church, in general, being involved in church multiplication, and I can see myself, in particular, being involved in that process."

Steps Involved in the Process

The following are some of the important steps to work through in the process of casting a vision for church multiplication. I have included a brief checklist in the conclusion to also assist in this process.

Pray

Assuming that the vision from the Lord has been received, the vision must now be cast before the people. The first step in the vision casting process is to pray. Pray that as the vision is cast before the people they will be receptive to that vision. Pray that God would be glorified in the vision casting process. Pray that ungodly conflict related to the vision will never exist. Pray for spiritual protection for both you and the hearers. Pray that God will give you the necessary wisdom along the way to draw out that vision within your heart.

Pray for patience as you cast the vision before the people.

Just as the Lord was gracious to allow you to have the time to mull over the vision for multiplication, likewise you need to extend the grace to the people and allow them the time to reflect, discuss, and pray over the vision that you set before them. It is unfair and selfish to have grasped the vision over a period of weeks, months, or even years, and then expect others to grasp the vision within minutes or hours.

Understand what "Communicates" with Your People

Second, understand the people to whom the vision is being cast. Who are these people? What do they like and dislike? What are their educational levels? What are their backgrounds? An intimate knowledge of the people provides the vision caster with a better foundation on which to contextualize the vision for the people. For example, knowing that a group of individuals grasp ideas better through interpersonal communication rather than through a lecture, will affect the way one casts a vision to the people.

Know the Possibilities

Third, part of the vision casting process includes educating oneself and the church to what the Spirit has shown both historically and in contemporary societies, to be a multiplicative-growth possibility. People need to know and to see what the Spirit has done and continues to do through His churches. Begin this step with a study of the Scriptures. As you study, constantly ask the following questions: What was the role of the Spirit in the Apostolic Church? What did the Spirit enable the believers to accomplish in regard to a disciple-making movement? What was required of the believers to be used by the Spirit in such a movement of churches that planted churches across the known world?

Take some time to examine what the Spirit has done throughout Church history during the times in which rapid disciple-making occurred resulting in the planting of numerous churches. A brief study of the Moravians, early Methodists and Baptists, and Pentecostals would be very helpful, even if one does not agree entirely with their theologies.

Examine what the Spirit is currently doing among churches throughout the world in what is commonly referred to as church planting movements. In many countries, the Church is witnessing an extremely rapid rate of reproduction in which churches are planting churches through evangelism that is primarily carried out by non-professional clergy. It is not uncommon to hear of a handful of churches multiplying into scores of churches with

hundreds of new believers, all within a few years.

Compare your biblical study with the church planting movements that have occurred since the days of the Apostles. What characteristics of the rapid growth of the Apostolic Church can be found in the times of rapid growth of the Church throughout history? What were the understandings of the nature of the Church and the nature of church leadership among the believers in the Scriptures and among the believers who have participated in church planting movements throughout history?

Recognize the Barriers

Fourth, recognition of the barriers to church multiplication must be taken into consideration both before the vision is cast and during the vision casting process. The Lord may provide the vision, but we may hinder the fulfillment of that vision by allowing our cultural expectations to overrule the vision. When God speaks, we must always allow our traditions to bow to His Lordship.

Since church multiplication is such a foreign concept to some, radical cultural barriers must be understood and overcome before an effective vision can be cast and appropriated by the people. *In all likelihood, most established churches that have been in existence for years will not be able to overcome the cultural barriers hindering church multiplication movements; however, those churches can understand the barriers are present and do all they can to work to plant churches that are not encased in the cultural barriers from the very beginning.*

One common barrier is that of accommodation. For example, many North American churches are built upon foundations that are a blend of biblical principles and Western ideologies such as, individualism, institutionalism, pragmatism, professionalism, a bigger-is-better mentality, and a "no money, no movement" perspective. This accommodation to Western culture is unhealthy for our churches in general, and for church multiplication in particular. If we have been involved in a church that has accommodated itself to the culture to an unhealthy degree, then it will be difficult for us to grasp a vision of planting churches different from our past and present experiences.

One way to work with your people in overcoming an unhealthy understanding of the church is to conduct a study of what the Bible says is the church. In examining passages throughout the New Testament, ask the following questions: In what ways were the early believers required to be different from their cultures to be followers of Jesus and thus a part of the Church? How much of our current understanding and practices

of the church are solely our culture, and how much of our current understanding and practices of the church are biblical? Are there any elements in our cultural understanding of the church that hinder the natural expansion of our church through church planting? What are the most basic requirements for the church to exist in any culture and in any time throughout the world; do we desire to plant this understanding of the church, or are we trying to clone our cultural understanding of church among the people we desire to reach with the gospel? Are we trying to plant churches that accommodate to the unbelievers' culture at the sacrifice of the biblical elements necessary for a reproducing congregation?

Another common barrier is maintaining a poor definition of leadership. For example, many North American churches have a very unhealthy understanding of church leadership. In most cases, we define leadership in terms of academic achievements and popularity, instead of defining leadership according to the biblical guidelines; we tend to define leadership in a very narrow and exclusive sense. Ask yourself, how many of the biblical guidelines for overseers are related to academic achievement, including the ability to teach and exhort from the Scriptures? How many of the qualifications for leadership are related to character, moral, ethical, and familial areas that can only be known by the congregation as they have spent time with the potential leaders? An unhealthy understanding of leadership hinders the possibility of church multiplication.

A third barrier to overcome is holding to a shallow understanding of the power of the Holy Spirit to seal, sanctify, and empower new churches. Many missionaries have a tendency to keep a heavy hand on new believers, as if they cannot be the church from the very moment when they come together as a baptized body of regenerate individuals. The Apostle had such a missionary faith in the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the lives of the new believers that he could spend a short time with the people, and travel on to preach the gospel and plant other churches.

A fourth barrier to overcome to be effective in casting a vision for multiplication, is to understand that in most cases whenever church planting methods and new churches are dependent upon large amounts of finances and a great deal of resources from outside sources, multiplication is hindered. Whenever new believers in new churches are taught to depend upon a source necessary for their existence as a church, outside of the Holy Spirit working through them, they develop a mentality that hinders rapid multiplication.

A fifth barrier that must be overcome is the belief that churches should not and cannot send out missionary teams that follow after the practice of the Apostle Paul. It has been said that we fail in missionary work in exactly the areas in which the Apostle Paul succeeded. There should be an expectation for church planting teams that will evangelize unbelievers, congregationalize the new believers, raise up leaders from the new church, and then repeat the process.

The sixth barrier to overcome is that of cultural blindness. Even if the lost population to which I feel called to plant a church speaks the same language, is of the same ethnicity, wears similar clothing, lives in the same community, and is in the same socio-economic bracket as myself, I should not assume that we have similar worldviews. I should not assume that the methodologies used to reach me with the gospel, and the culture of church to which I am the most comfortable will be the necessary methodologies and culture of church that will connect with those unbelievers.

Communicate the Vision Redundantly

A fifth step in the vision casting process is to communicate the vision redundantly. Rick Warren recommends restating the vision every twenty-six days.⁴ Begin with the church's leadership. If the leaders of the church are not behind the vision and willing to work to fulfill the vision, then it is highly unlikely that the rest of the church will be supportive of the vision. As much as possible, keep the vision before the leaders and equip them to keep the vision before the rest of the church. Develop creative ways to communicate the vision to the leadership and the entire church. Take your leaders on a weekend retreat to spend time in prayer, Bible study, and discussion concerning the vision. Make the vision a part of your sermons, classes, bulletins, home gatherings, newsletters, and casual conversations with the church.

Conclusion

The process of vision casting for church multiplication is more art than science. Communicators must recognize the significance of spending time with the Lord to gain an understanding of the picture they must paint. Once this vision has consumed the leader, a healthy understanding of the culture of the people must be present. Failure to contextualize the communication of the vision will hinder the possibility of the vision ever becoming a reality. Vision casters will do well by preparing themselves to overcome any barriers to multiplication, before they begin to cast the vision for multiplication. The following

checklist has been designed as a process to assist one in the vision casting for church multiplication process.

Action Steps

Paint an Impressionistic Vision of the Possibilities

- Write down the vision you desire to cast, thinking through the details - *Pray About the Possibilities*
- Design a prayer strategy for both you and your church leaders - *Understand Your People as You Communicate the Possibilities*
- List the most effective means in communicating such a vision - *Educate Yourself and the People Concerning the Possibilities*
- Develop a plan to study and discuss church multiplication - *Recognize the Problems that Prevent the Possibilities*
- Develop a plan to study and discuss the barriers - *Constantly Promote the Possibilities*
- Describe how you will promote the vision over the next year

Writer

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NOTES

1. Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 134.
2. *Ibid.*, 134-37.
3. Unless otherwise noted, I will always refer to the local church with a lowercase "c" and the universal, national, or denominational church with an uppercase "C."
4. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Comprom*

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missing Your Mission (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 111.

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