

section 2 - discerning the direction

Slides Handouts



Background In section 2 we look at how we put things into practice.

How you run section 2 will depend on your church situation and on the participants. For example...

- Some churches have already discerned God's vision, communicated it clearly to the congregation and are trying to implement it. They probably have a vision statement, a mission action plan and so on. You may like to check ownership of the vision by asking participants to (a) state the vision; (b) comment on the difference it makes to the way they lead in their area of responsibility.
- Some churches will be in the middle of the process. With this in mind, you could focus on moving the vision-discerning process the next stage.
- Some won't have a clear sense of where God is leading the church - possibly for very good reasons. If that is the case, use the time to identify principles for starting the process.

So, as course leaders, you will need to tailor this material to your situation, concentrating on helping participants discern God's direction for their area of responsibility.

Section 2 has an underlying assumption that vision is found in the gap between where we are and where God would like us to be. Therefore we can think of 'vision' as a response to the question, 'Where are we called to go?' And the basics of discovering God's 'picture' are simple: study of his word and openness to his Holy Spirit.



Aim
0-5 mins

Arrival

Be sure to start back on time, perhaps with some lively music playing to keep people upbeat!

Introduction

Welcome people back after the break. Take a moment to see if anything needs clarifying. If you've still got the compasses laid out on the floor, draw people's attention to them and to our need to submit ourselves to God's leadership. Explain that this section of the day introduces a simple way of discerning God's vision for a group or church. The material begins with an exercise considering vision for the whole church, and then uses an activity to allow each participant look at vision in their area of leadership.

Pray for the session.

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B Bible
5-45 mins

Acts 2: Spot the difference

We've already noted that vision should be rooted in God. He is both the source of vision and its end point - alpha and omega. But most of us are painfully aware of a big gap between where we are and where God wants us to be.

The exciting thing about vision is that it may be the story, picture or plan of how God leads us to 'close the gap'. The following exercise encourages participants to look at God's 'ideal' through the example of an early Christian community, and to reflect on how it could inform our vision of what it means to be 'church'.

- Tell everyone that we're going to play 'spot the difference'.
- Read Acts 2:42-47 to the group - but using the text given below. Invite participants to try to listen to the reading.

Occasionally they spent some time listening to the apostles' teaching and, when they could, they met together for fellowship, for the breaking of bread and for prayer.

Awe came upon some of them. But there were no signs and wonders. All who believed were separated into groups and kept themselves apart in all they did; they would hoard their possessions and goods and show indifference to those in need.

Day by day, they went about their lives as individuals, only meeting weekly or fortnightly in the temple. They broke bread at home alone and ate their food with cold and empty hearts, giving token thanks to God. They were held in contempt by all the people. And day by day their numbers dwindled and it seemed that few were being saved.

- Distribute the handouts. Ask participants to briefly chat to a partner about the differences between the phoney and the authentic texts. Note that this is only one picture of the early church, but it presents a powerful vision of what a 'God-focused' community can look like.

Then ask participants in groups of four to explore the following:

- What do the differences you've identified between the two passages highlight about the nature of Christian community?
- Which aspects reflect where you are now?
- Which aspects reflect where you would like to be?

After ten minutes gather some feedback from their conversations. Remind people that this passage offers one 'vision' of what the church can be like. The gap between where we are now and where God would like us to be is the place where vision is birthed. Depending on where you are with your church vision, make connections with already existing vision documents or explain how this exercise will inform future conversations.

Slides Handouts

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Spot the difference

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Slides Handouts

Bible 5-45 mins

Slide 53 offers a shortened version of a process for gaining vision based on *Growing Leaders* pages 199-208. You may like to talk through this shortened version.

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- Clarify the process: at the start of discerning vision be clear about how you are going to do it. (Stage i-2 in *Growing Leaders* p.199-202.)
- Discern the gap: what is the gap between present reality and God's ideal? (Stage 3-4, *Growing Leaders* p.203-204.)
- Decide the direction: where is God leading? (Stage 5-6 *Growing Leaders* p.205-207.)
- Implement the vision: (Stage 7-8 *Growing Leaders* p.208-213.)

The next activity provides space for reflection on applying these insights to individual leadership roles.

Activity 45-75 mins

Option 1: Personal reflection

Invite participants to take thirty minutes to be quiet and alone as they reflect on God's vision for those they lead. If possible offer a variety of options:

- A quiet room with a 'visual focus' - a cross, the compasses arranged beside it
- An area to sit or to write in journals; tape or CD playing quiet music
- An art area with paper, paints, brushes and pencils
- A map indicating some short local walks
- You already have an overall church vision or equivalent? Display it so that people can pray through it and reflect on its impact on their area of leadership
- Further suggestions are listed on pages 203-204 of *Growing Leaders*.

Option 2 Group time

Invite participants to form small groups representing similar types of leadership responsibility.

Ask the groups to reflect on the 'Acts 2' vision of the church:

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- What challenges does this make to your personal leadership style?
- Try to identify ways in which the group/team that you lead comes close to this vision. Think about their relationships, attitude to possessions, commitment to fellowship, openness to God, practice of celebration - and so on.
- What do you think is God's vision for your group/team? What is the present reality? Where do you think he might like to take you? Feel free to be idealistic.
- How does all of this link with your church's overall vision of your church (if you have one)?