



Vision for the Adventure

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Acts 16:6-10

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A couple of weeks ago, I drove daughter Shelley to Turkey Run, a park off the GW Parkway where we walked down the steep hill to the bank of the Potomac River. It was the very spot where my own dad used to take me fishing. I spent the afternoon fishing by catching tree limbs and rocks, and Shelley spent the afternoon catching laughter.

Wonderful adventure! We've been talking about taking the adventure our Lord has for you and has for us. Some of our adventures are marvelous, some miserable; yet, in every case our truest adventure is the interior adventure of the soul, trusting Jesus, the Lord who loves us, who strengthens us through his Holy Spirit. We walk in the spirit of the Hebrew word, *hineni*, "Here I am, Lord. My answer is yes to whatever adventure you have for me before you even ask me." On our adventures we learn to call things good and to lay our hearts alongside the hearts of those we journey with together.

We've been looking at the lives of the early Christians as described for us in the Book of Acts. We see right away that they often knew exactly what they wanted to do, yet often had no idea how to do it. All they could do was trust God and try something. Their vision was crystal clear – to love their Lord Jesus, to love each other, and to share Jesus with as many people as possible. It's our vision, too. Sometimes we don't know how to do it and all we can do is trust God and try something. Vision is very much a part of every

adventure from the big visions we may have for our church, our work, our home, to the smaller visions of what's for dinner or a trip to the beach. Vision is very much about what we want to do and where we want to go.

I love the John Maxwell story when he said, “The other night my three-year old son and I had been through the regular nightly routine: story, prayer, hugs. Then as my hand slid down the light switch, [I heard] ‘I want a gink.’ He can’t say ‘drink’ and I thought it was kinda cute, ‘gink’. But, I was firm. ‘You just had a drink when you brushed your teeth. Now it’s time to go to sleep.’ I sat in my chair downstairs began to sort the mail when I heard, ‘I want a gink!’ ‘No water! Go to sleep.’ Quietness reigned for at least 60 seconds. ‘Daddy, I want a gink.’ ‘Be quiet.’ ‘I want a gink.’ I knew how Moses felt in the wilderness with a million Jews all crying, ‘We want a gink.’

“I yelled up the stairs into the darkness, ‘If I hear you ask for a gink one more time, I’m spanking you and I’m not kidding. Be quiet. Go to bed!’ It was so quiet, so silent I couldn’t concentrate on the mail. Then, the still, small voice of a child, sensing victory, ‘Daddy, when you come to spank me could you bring me a gink of water?’”¹ That kid had a vision! He was willing to trust his dad and try something.

¹ Dynamic Preaching (Seven Worlds, Vol. XIV, No. 3) p.40.

Soon after the completion of Disney World, someone said, “Isn’t it too bad that Walt Disney didn’t live to see this?” Mike Vance, creative director of Disney Studios at the time, replied, “He did see it—that’s why it’s here.” Vision! My mentor, Jim Tozer, taught me that in the Bible, vision means “to see what God wants to do through you.”² Abraham Lincoln said, "I see a storm coming; I know the hand of God is in it. I believe he has a purpose for me; I am ready." Vision is seeing what God wants to do through you! God said, “Abram, go forth from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.” Vision. Abram trusted God was going to do something through him. “Follow me and I will make you fishers of people.” Vision. God was to do something through those disciples. When you have vision, when our church has vision, we see what God can do through us, the adventure God has for us.

What happens when there is no vision? We want to keep things just the way they are. We try to maintain our home, our church, our community exactly the way they are. We do only what is necessary. We make no sacrifices, settle for tradition and repetition. We say, "Things are good enough for me." It’s just that there is no such thing as keeping things the same. God has created us to either incline or decline, to

² James R. Tozer, Ultimate Confidence, p. 67.

increase in vitality or die. Our vision looks backwards to stagnation or forward to life.

Our text from the Book of Acts this morning is a curious one and a little background is helpful to understanding what was going on. You may remember, Barnabas goes to the city of Antioch, sees an exciting, growing church by the grace of God, and he is glad; he calls it good. He recruits the apostle Paul to join what becomes a large, multi-staff church in Antioch. One day, the Holy Spirit calls Barnabas and Paul to go on the first missionary journey around the coast of the Mediterranean. It goes well and eventually Paul and companions set out on the second missionary journey. Their vision was to encourage the Christians and to share Jesus with new communities.

Our story picks up in Acts 16. *6 And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.* Paul wants to go to an area called Asia, but he was forbidden by the Holy Spirit. We have no idea how he was forbidden. A problem with the roads, maybe? Some other issue? We don't know. Paul continues his journey. *7 And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.* Again, Paul is blocked. The Spirit of Jesus did not allow him. He wants to go north but the

doors close. The fact is, Paul's vision was clear, he wanted to go north to speak about Jesus, but it wasn't working!

I find it helpful to look at the challenges in our lives through two lenses. We may call one of the lenses "technical challenges," and the other lens "adaptive challenges." This is language introduced to us by the work of Harvard Professor Ronald Heifetz. A technical challenge is any challenge for which you know what to do. Fry an egg, fly an airplane. Play the piano or mow the lawn. Those are technical challenges because we know how to do them. On the other hand, an adaptive challenge is any challenge for which your technical knowledge isn't adequate. You have to try out things. Some work. Some fail. We try to solve adaptive challenges with our technical know-how, but it won't work by definition. Adaptive challenges require new ideas, new approaches. A friend of mine is a school principal. When the pandemic hit she had to change guidelines, procedures, and policies practically weekly because there were no books on running a school during a pandemic. Hers was an adaptive challenge, and we all have both technical and adaptive challenges in life.

For many years our family traveled down to the beach of Gulf Shores, Alabama for summer vacation. One summer we finished the two-day drive at about six o'clock at night, too late to go to a grocery store, so we went to a local restaurant,

The Oyster House, set on a bayou of water. A bayou is a small waterway that comes from the ocean and forms something of a marshy area. While we were eating, I could see through a window that people were throwing something into the water. After dinner we went outside to discover that they were feeding crackers to the minnows. Looking closer I realized the minnows were Sailfin Mollies, a strikingly beautiful tropical fish. I love aquariums and have had them all my life. I said to our son, “Hey, Lee. Look. Sailfin Mollies! They cost eight dollars a pair at PetSmart and here, they’re free!”

The next day, Lee and I went to a local grocery store and for only ten dollars we bought a long-handled dip net. We discovered over several days of chasing that Sailfin Mollies are extremely wary, very fast, difficult to catch. We caught a lot of minnows but no Sailfins. I’d thought about it for the next year and went to a fisherman’s bait shop, where for only twenty dollars I bought a net that was two feet square with a rope attached to the top. It was designed to sink to the bottom, and when we saw a fish swim over the net, we pulled it in like crazy. That second summer, we caught a lot of minnows, but catching those fast, beautiful Sailfins? They’d thumb their dorsal fins at us and scoot away the moment we pulled the rope.

Another year passed but no new ideas. I thought it was a technical challenge that I knew how to solve but it was adaptive and what we knew to do wasn't working. The next summer Lee and I were back in those muddy marshes. All we had were those two nets, and as people do, we tried to solve our adaptive challenge with our technical know-how and it wasn't working. We were standing on a road looking at the water holding our nets when a pick-up truck drove up. A man jumped out of the truck, took a net out of the back of the truck, draped it over his left arm, held a portion of the net between his teeth, and twisting, he hurled it over the water. It unfolded like a giant pizza, ten feet across, landed on the water and sank to the bottom, pinning the fish underneath. When he pulled on the rope, the net scooped up all of the minnows. He tossed fifty huge Sailfins into a bucket, smiled at us, and drove off. Lee and I looked at each other! We walked back to the apartment, jumped in the car, mud and all, and found a net store, and for only fifty dollars bought ourselves a cast net. Later that day, we arrived back at the apartment with a jar of Sailfin Mollies, "Look, Ann Marie, our free fish!"

We all have technical challenges we can solve, and adaptive challenges for which what we know won't work. All we can do is trust God and try something. Our church faces several adaptive challenges today, as do many organizations, challenges for which what we know is

inadequate. One of our adaptive challenges began before the pandemic. Like most Presbyterian churches, we were doing well with the over-fifty-year-olds, but not as well with those who are younger. Why call it an adaptive challenge?

Because we were doing what we knew to do but it wasn't bearing the fruit it used to produce. As poet David Lehman put it, "The 20th Century is the name of a train that no longer runs!" We need new ideas in the face of an adaptive reality.

Another adaptive challenge is that the pandemic seems to be melting, at least in our area, at least right now. People are emerging. You know the common phrases we are hearing? When will we go back to... this or that group? When will we return to... this or that routine? When will we bring back... this or that event Those are natural questions and good questions. Many of us would love to return to old habits. At the same time, people grew new habits during the pandemic. I talked to one dad who said, "Frankly, online worship doesn't connect with me and our kids are bored so we are out bicycling." A lot of people formed new habits and we can't assume that they want to come back, return, or bring back anything. You and I have the adaptive challenge of finding fresh ways to re-encourage their excitement about Jesus.

All of us face both technical challenges – you know what to do – and adaptive challenges – what you know won't

work in your life. So, here, the Apostle Paul has tried to go east into Asia and is blocked. He goes tries to go north into Bithynia and is blocked. He ends up in a town on the coast called Troas. Paul has no idea what to do or where to go. It's an adaptive reality. Then we read,⁹ *And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."* Paul had no idea what to do. God gives him a clue. Vision is seeing what God wants to do through you!

When we face an adaptive challenge, we trust God and try things. Some will work. Some will fail. If they fail, so what? We trust God and we try new things. We aren't critical of failure. We are learning. We are glad for the effort and we call the effort *good!* What happened to Paul and his companions after they prayed in Troas? They boarded a ship to Macedonia, northern Greece, and end up in the town of Philippi. On Saturday, they decided to go to the local river to find a place of prayer where Paul meets a businesswoman named Lydia. She listens to Paul talk about Jesus, invited Jesus into her life; Jesus changes her life.

Think about Paul's travels from two perspectives. First, from Paul's perspective, he had crossed Asia Minor, repeatedly being blocked, and being confused. But if you look at his travel on a map, you see it's a straight shot across a continent directly to Lydia. What may be adaptive, unclear

to you, can be a straight path in the eyes of God to encourage another person! If God encourages your life by another person, who knows what confusing adaptive challenges they have navigated, but from God's perspective, they were on a journey straight to you!

Vision is seeing what God wants to do through you. I'd like to briefly suggest two simple vision ideas, something God can do through you. Both ideas are technical challenges. You can do them! One idea is from Phil Kratovil: Host an Open Driveway Friday. It's so do-able. Open your driveway from 5 to 7 p.m. on a Friday. Offer simple food and drink and invite your friends and neighbors to drop by. So many of us have been so shut up during this pandemic, this offers a very non-threatening way to touch a lot of people. A second idea, this one from Pastor Connie, is you – maybe with a buddy – host a backyard barbecue for your VPC friends, group, whomever, but include a few others – neighbors, friends, just for time to enjoy connecting as the summer unfolds. Trust God and try something!

Ann Marie and I are staying in Fairfax City. We hadn't met any neighbors until last Sunday night, the 4th of July. All of the sudden everyone was outside chatting; there were kids and fireworks. Great fun. Then a couple told us they have a one-month old baby in the hospital with Leukemia. I thought I'd hit a brick wall. What? Vision is seeing what God wants

to do through you. Suddenly the idea of an Open Driveway Friday or a backyard barbecue made even more sense. People around us are on all kinds of adventures and to open your driveway or your yard really is opening your life to them. Nervous? Trust God and try it!

I once boarded a flight in Orlando, Florida heading for New Orleans to visit my parents. It was a Southwest Airlines flight, and as we went tearing down the runway, the pilot came on over the speakers. Pilots never talk to passengers during take-off so I'm all ears. And what does the pilot say? "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can!" It's the spirit of adventure. Trust God and try. If it's adaptive change for which what you know won't work, then you trust God and try, maybe you can and maybe you can't. The Lord who loves you is very present help in times of triumph and in times of trouble, and that Lord will be with you. Take courage, take the adventure our Lord has for you and keep on trying!