

## #252 "Vision"

### T.H.R.I.V.E. part 5

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Before the Scripture was complete, God spoke in diverse ways in the Old Testament and even in the early church, including giving people visions (Hebrews 1:1-2). Typically, though not always, visions were given to the prophets, who were to share the oracle that they had been given by God with the people. They were to relate what they had seen and heard so that God's Word could be spoken to the people. This was an essential ministry then just as teaching and preaching the Word is today. The prophets' main job was to point people to the truth of the law of God so that they would live in a manner worthy of their calling (Ephesians 4:1), being obedient to God no matter the cost and regardless of the pagan influences around them.

Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained, But happy is he who keeps the law." Without the spiritual vision of being reminded of God's law, people tend to, like sheep, go their own way (Isaiah 53:6). The end objective of happiness that so many seek in futility is actually found in obeying God's commandments. This is so unnatural to the sinful natural heart and to the flesh, which is why all people need to hear and believe the Scripture. God's Word is our map, the light to our paths. Otherwise, we wander in darkness, pursuing vain, futile ambitions characteristic of false teaching. For example, in America, several of the largest churches are devoted to the health and wealth prosperity gospel. The idea is to appeal to man's love of self, although couching things in Bible language, so that people leave hearing the vision of the day feeling better about themselves rather than being crushed by the weight of the laws of God. Scripture is supposed to cut us to the deepest parts of joints and marrow so that the true thoughts of the heart are actually discerned rather than glossed over (Hebrews 4:12). To say that all that life is about is to get a vision of our greatest dreams, ambitions, and desires and then to slap God's will on the package is vain imagination and an exercise in futility. "The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps" (Proverbs 16:9). God's way may include not getting promoted at work, losing a friend because of sharing the gospel, getting an incurable disease, and having a tough go of it financially. But the itching ears of the masses long to be told that they can be rich, good-looking, well-known, and healthy, too, because they are told that it is the oracle from God.

When we as believers get sucked into even elements of this teaching, which is easy given its massive prevalence, we will lose our joy and develop a false vision of what it means to thrive and live the abundant life. The reality is that God has called us to a sacrificial life that is God-devoted and others-serving rather than consumed with selfish ambition and vain conceit (Philippians 2:3). Even charity and humanitarian causes can be hijacked by false thinking that glorifies self if we are doing it to make ourselves happy rather than to serve God and obey Him. **Happiness is the by-product of holiness and faithfulness rather than the core objective in and of itself.** He who wishes to save His life must lose it for Christ's sake. This is because the call of His disciples is to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him in His example of self-sacrifice (Matthew 16:24-25), ministry to the needy, and never popular

call of telling people to repent and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15). The gospel is not about our best life now on earth as defined by material and other worldly measures of success, but the abundant life is related to the fact that godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6). It is to overflow with Jesus in the inner man even if the outside is full of trials and pain. To thrive is not to seek out the absence of pain and to pursue self-glorifying ambition while calling it God-given; rather, it is to lay down the totality of our hearts for the sake of the call of Christ and to do whatever He asks of us, no matter how small and seemingly insignificant. It is a willingness to die so that others might live rather than a holding tightly to getting all that we can out of this world (Philippians 2:6). **Living life fully alive is dying fully to self, a total inversion of what the popular oracles of the day say.**

The Bible has many warnings about listening to false visions of what our lives should be about. For example, Jeremiah 23:16 says, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; They speak a vision of their own imagination, Not from the mouth of the LORD.'" We are not to imagine for ourselves a life in which money, fame, and renown have satisfied the soul, for Christ says that we will be great in heaven if we become the servant of all (Mark 9:35). All else is futility and a chasing after the wind. Just ask Solomon who had it all, for he wrote those very words (Ecclesiastes 2:11). Consider also Lamentations 2:14, which says, "Your prophets have seen for you False and foolish visions; And they have not exposed your iniquity So as to restore you from captivity, But they have seen for you false and misleading oracles." Popular teachers tend not to be the ones who expose the iniquity hiding in the hearts of people, but such is necessary to be a true spokesperson for God. The end result of listening to teaching meant to comfort through self-help and therapeutic means is described by Zechariah 10:2, which says, "For the teraphim speak iniquity, And the diviners see lying visions And tell false dreams; They comfort in vain. Therefore the people wander like sheep, They are afflicted, because there is no shepherd." Even "Christian" self-help does not truly comfort, for it is merely a pep talk for selfish desire. **True joy comes in submitting to the Good Shepherd, for only then can the wandering stop.**

God's will is always our sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3). It is always merciful and good, though it is not always fun and easy. It typically does not look like what we thought it would look like, and likely God's plan for our lives is nothing like what we had thought it would be. But what is sure is that we will find that submission to Christ is in line with the true delights of our hearts (Psalm 37:4), and we will see that keeping His commandments no matter what will lead us to the good works that He has prepared for us to do in this life (Ephesians 2:10). **Life is about faithfulness to the Word, becoming a servant, denying self, and obeying God's Word no matter what.**

Without a clear spiritual vision we will be doomed to spiritual weakness (Colossians 1:10-11), compromising (1 Corinthians 1:10), settling (Ephesians 3:20), and even making shipwreck of our faith (1 Timothy 1:19). God desires that we bear abundant fruit (John 15:5), for this is characteristic of the abundant life. Thriving requires a true vision of success, of God's will, and of how the gospel actually advances. God doesn't need egotistical superstars; rather, He desires those who will humbly obey, deny themselves for the sake of proclaiming the gospel, and seek not to be served but to serve just as Jesus did (Mark 10:45). That is a vision that will preserve our souls, bring true happiness, and enable us to endure spiritually to the end.

Next up: Endurance

What is T.H.R.I.V.E.? God has promised His children the abundant life (John 10:10), even when life is full of trials (John 16:33). Like the Israelites wandering in the desert, sometimes life feels like surviving more than thriving. Yet, even there, God provided for them bread from heaven and water from a rock. More importantly, He helped them learn that man does not live on bread alone but upon His Word (Deuteronomy 8:3). It is feasting upon the inviolable truths of Scripture that can enable us to endure. Even in times of earthly abundance, we will starve without the food of doing God's will (John 4:34). 2 Corinthians 4:16 says, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." This six part series will feed our souls so that we do not lose heart by strengthening the inner man despite what may be happening to us on the outside. To thrive is to live life fully alive.