

# Habakkuk 1:1-2:3; Proverbs 29:17-18; Psalms 127:3

Sunday 1/9/2005

## I. Laying a Baseline for Understanding God's Word

Turn with me to the book of Habakkuk. That's a book that's almost at the end of your Old Testament. Don't feel bad if you can't find it right off the bat. I can't find it, so I'll just make up what I was going to say this morning, and it'll work just fine. I had to put a string in mine so I could find it. Don't feel bad.

As you know, we have been working through the Bible and really trying to lay a baseline for the people that are members of this church to help you truly get an understanding of the Word of God. We know as a church that God has given us a mission. I know enough about building churches to know that the first year or two, you really have to work on your base. Nothing will go up until it goes out. Getting your church higher than the base will never be a stable church because your stability always lies in the base.

So what we have done is we have been coming through book by book, really defining how these books lay out, really showing you what to look for when you read the Bible. On top of that, we have our time on Thursday night where we just allow you to ask questions about things you may not understand about the Bible that may be in your own personal study or whatever. Then we have the option that you can do that one-on-one. I've told you many, many times that I'll help you any way that I can. Anybody in here—any couple, any single, any whatever—one-on-one, I will sit down with you and help you understand how the Bible goes together.

I'll do what you want to do. I'm not going to come in and say, "Okay, here's what you want." Maybe you're struggling with raising your kids. Maybe you have issues with your marriage. I don't know. I don't care. Maybe you just want to get a handle on the Word of God, and you want somebody to sit down with you and really kind of lay it out for you. Well, that's what we do around here, and that's what it's all about.

## II. The Book of Habakkuk: Historical Context and Structure

So today we come to the book of Habakkuk. Last week, if you were here, we talked about the book of Nahum, and you saw a great lesson in that book. You saw how that little book contains so much content of our own personal life and the things that we need to do, and how it really, really focused on some issues that every Christian needs to understand. Habakkuk is the same way.

Historically, Habakkuk is a book that is written before the captivity, before the exile. It's written to Judah, the southern tribe, just like Nahum was. The storyline historically goes along the same, but you need to understand the historical context to be able to make the applications that we need to see today.

Habakkuk ministers; he preaches. His ministry is during the last days of the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel is going through its death throes. It's almost ready to cease to exist. It fits into that time period that we talked about New Year's Eve when we laid out the Middle East of the captivity. It's right there before God's judgment comes down and destroys them. They're in their last moments.

For a long time, God's people had been repeatedly told they needed to repent. God, through all of the prophets, has called them to come back to God, to repentance. Of course, the nation very stubbornly refuses to change. We saw this if you remember last week. I read you that little story in Matthew 21 that really gave you a capsule view of the nation of Israel. We talked about it then.

Habakkuk, one of the prophets, is burdened for the nation of Israel. He asks God how long this terrible condition can exist. In the end, God says, "Look, that wicked city Babylon, the enemy of God, the enemy of God's people, I'm going to use that Gentile nation to be the chastising rod for My people." God told them this a long time ago. God told them that if they didn't do what was right with Him and the Word of God, that God would use the other nation to chastise them. So now we see the fulfillment of that.

The time period here is 606 B.C., right at the beginning of the times of the Gentiles. What we see here is God, through Habakkuk, laying out the burden that God is going to use. He's going to use this sinful nation, Babylon, to judge and chastise His people. Habakkuk reacts with shock and dismay. He's overwhelmed at what God is going to do. He sees it. He probably sees it better than anybody else because he's closer to God than anybody else. He sees the destruction and the agony and the terrible conditions that are about to befall God's people because of their rebellious attitude and because of the fact that they won't do what's right. But in all of that burden that he lays out, God comforts him as only God can and says to him, "Hey, you know what? This is necessary. It's necessary for the people of God to go through what they have to go through for them to come back to Me." It's an incredible story from a historical standpoint.

Now, the breakdown of the book: as I said, you want to get a breakdown of each chapter here in these books and put them at the beginning of your Bible so when you begin to read it as you come through the Bible, you can understand it.

- Chapter 1: The Burden of Habakkuk
- Chapter 2: God's Answer to His Burden
- Chapter 3: God's Comfort to Him in His Answer

Of course, the comfort here in the promise that God is making is the promise of the second coming of Christ and the restoration of the nation of Israel. You see how all this fits into what we talked about New Year's Eve about the Middle East and how it's all where it's been, where it's going, where it's coming from. It's an incredible little book.

### III. The Concept of Vision in the Minor Prophets

I don't know if you've noticed this or not; I don't think I've mentioned this to you, but one of the great things about what we call the minor prophets—and we defined that when we started, that there are the prophets and then there are the minor prophets. The prophets are the big books like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, that run many, many chapters. The minor prophets are books that cover shorter periods, like two or three chapters, six chapters, five chapters, something like that. They're not minor because they have less material in them; they're minor because they're shorter.

In fact, the great thing about the minor prophets you need to learn is because they are smaller, because they are shorter, God focuses more on conceptual concepts. In other words, each one of these minor prophet books is a defining book about some great concept. In the book of Habakkuk, you have defined for you one of the greatest concepts that you individually need to have, and I need to have, and this church needs to have. It's a concept of understanding what it means when the Bible talks about God's people having a vision.

Now, I'm not talking about, "I was out on the back porch, and I looked up in the sky, and I saw God's hand writing." I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about that God has something that He wants you to do. What He wants you to do, God shows you through your relationship with Him. God has something that He wants this church to accomplish, so God provides a vision.

In fact, one of the verses that is the greatest—I talked a while back about salient verses, salient being a word that means to jump out, to stick up, to verses that just are very important verses. I gave you a number of them, and we're going through our study, but Proverbs 29 is one that you want to mark down, verse 18. Because it says a great verse, and it says:

*And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.*

Now that verse says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." The whole book of Habakkuk, especially chapter two, defines how I as a pastor, and you as a Christian, really understand and grasp the vision that God has for us. That's what we're going to talk about today. That's what Israel has lost. The reason why Israel has lost its power with God, the reason why Israel is a nation at this time, and still is today, a nation that is totally dysfunctional as far as God is concerned, is because they have lost the vision.

When you lose your vision, you lose your purpose. When you lose your purpose, you lose your direction. That is what Israel's problem is. Of course, that's exactly what our problem is many times. This is really detailed in chapter two. We know from our study in Israel that God had called them out. He had a purpose for them. He gave them a mission. He made them a great nation. He wants them to bear fruit throughout the world. We talked about that last week. He gave them the land, the plan to Palestine, and He gave them His vision through the leadership that God provided, starting with Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, right on down the line. But Israel has lost their vision. They can no longer see what God sees. Consequently, they're off into the place where they've got everything else in their life except what they should have. God is about to come down and to chastise them as His people as He promised He would. That's why Habakkuk is so burdened.

There is nothing more frustrating for a pastor, for anybody. There's nothing more frustrating than understanding what God wants you to do and having people that won't do it. There's just absolutely nothing more frustrating in all the world than that. The failure in leadership will always produce a situation where they lose the vision. There's an old accolade which is so true, and it simply says, "Everything rises and falls on leadership." That is so true. That's why for a child of God to be a leader, there are some qualifications that just have to be there. We're not going to talk about that today because I want to talk to you about the concept of vision and how it lays itself out.

## IV. The Personal Application of Vision

Doctrinally, we've looked at the historical how Israel has lost their vision. But in a doctrinal sense, this concept of a vision really applies not only to Israel but applies to me and you. This is what we've got to see. I wish I could stand up here and say, "You know what? I knew exactly what we were going to do with all of this, and I knew exactly where we were going, and I planned all these last two books because they fit in so incredibly well." I wish I could tell you that, but that's not the way that it works.

Now, I've got a plan, and I know what I'm doing and where I'm going, and I know how we're going to accomplish that. But God is such an incredible God that He brings the things in that we need when we need it to shore up the things that show us where the places we need to go. I wish I could say that last week I planned that. I wish I could say this week I planned this, but I can't. I'll never take credit for what God does because there are some incredible things going on around here, and all of this fits right into where we're at. I want to talk to you about that today.

Now, I've got some good news and I've got some bad news. Let me give you the good news first. The good news is you're great people. I think for the most part, you have a heart for God. I don't know anybody in our church that I think doesn't have the ability to be everything that God wants them to be. Some of you may be more inclined to get it than others, but I don't know of anybody in our church that's a zero. I just don't. I think the majority of people have a heart for God and His Word. I see it in the questions you ask on Thursday night. I see it in our one-on-one times we have in the Bible. I don't know if we fully understand sometimes how lucky we really are.

Now, I'm not talking about in any way with me as pastor or whatever. I'm talking about in the day and age that we live in, having what we have, that God has brought the people together that love God, love each other, and genuinely want to do what God wants them to do and learn through the process of their life. God has brought the right people here and is continuing to do so. We talked about it last week, how this church is nothing more than a group of living believers that put forth light. People who want more light will come toward that light. I gave you a little illustration about the cave, and people who don't want that will go back into the cave. A church where there is no politics, there's no favoritism, everybody earns their own way, and everything is done based on the Word of God. That's how we operate. Because of that, in time, that will produce the right vision, and God's people will get involved into the concepts of ministry, exactly what we want.

Now that's the good news. The bad news is this: we're all still stuck with an old sin nature. That's the bad news. We're still in our flesh. We still have to contend with it. The battle for your mind is going to be a constant one. You lose the vision, as I've already said, you lose your purpose. The greatest conflict that you and I together—and I put me right in the middle of this. I am no better than you. I am no more spiritual than you are. It doesn't make any difference. We're all in the same foxhole, in the middle of the same battle, in the middle of the same war. I put my shoes and pants on just like you do. There is nothing more godly about me than there is about you. We're in this together. But the bad news is that we're still in the flesh, and we have to struggle with that flesh. Part of the ability to really grasp and be what God wants you to be is understanding and being honest with our weaknesses, for we all have them.

In a marriage scenario, the reason why God gave men and women and allowed them to be married and gave the concept of marriage is because they both bring strengths and weaknesses into the relationship. A man has strengths, but he also has weaknesses. A woman has strengths, but she also has weaknesses. The ability for both of them to recognize their own weaknesses and to recognize each other's strengths, and then to build on that where the one strength makes up for the other's weakness and the other's strength makes up, and they balance each other out—that's why God designed marriage the way that He did. That's why when you marry someone, you need to look on what is on the inside more than you do what's on the outside.

Now that doesn't mean you have to marry the ugliest woman in the world to be spiritual. I mean, forget the song, "If you want to be happy for the rest of your life, make an ugly woman." Remember that song Jimmy used to sing all the time? For you bet her and got married and found a beautiful woman. I'm helping you here, Jim. I'm trying to help you. Okay. But anyway, you don't have to do that. You recognize that the inner character, the inner qualities, is the most important concept.

The greatest single thing that I've learned throughout the years as being a pastor and dealing with people, and it's the thing that this church needs to always keep in front of our minds when it comes to understanding the vision, is the fact that the greatest revival we can have, the greatest Bible study that we could ever have where everybody just really gets turned into the Word of God, God comes down and taps you on the shoulder, the greatest preaching service or the greatest time that you and God have together where God just really comes down and ministers in your life, and you for a moment of time, you're like, it's you and Him and there ain't nobody else in the face of this planet, and you drive out of here and go home and you say, "God, that was the greatest thing I ever heard. That was the greatest thing I ever learned. It made me love You more. That book is so great." The thing you have got to remember, the greatest revival that this church would ever have, when the Amen is said and you start to walk out to go into your car, it begins to deteriorate. It begins to degenerate. That's the flesh. That's the way we are. We all have to struggle with that.

I wish that you would be just like a bunch of blow-up dolls that we could just fill you up with air, hot air in some cases, and then send you out and you'd never deflate. I remember one time I heard an old preacher. Every time he'd preach, this dear sister would come down and fall down on the altar, and she just kept saying, "Oh, God, fill me. Oh, God, fill me. Oh, God." Every time.

No matter what he preached, no matter how many times he preached, if nobody came forward, this old dear sweet sister came down, fell down on the altar, and just kept yelling every day, "Oh, God, fill me up. Oh, God, fill me. Oh, God." After about five years of that, she came down one night. He'd had it because everybody just kind of didn't do anything. No, sister so and so came down and hit the altar and said, "Fill me up." She said, "Oh," that night she came down and fell, flopped, and said, "Oh, God, fill me up." He said, "Stop. God, don't fill her up. Just fix the leak."

I love you. The good news is you're the greatest people in the world. The bad news is we got leaks. We got leaks. Everybody's got them. The greatest single thing that we need to learn about ourselves is the fact that the greatest revival we have in our lives, it begins to fall apart the moment you say amen and go on your way in life. The only thing that retards that, the only thing that stops that process, is a continual redefining of the vision of God in your life and my life, of what God constantly keeping it before you of what God wants you to do with your life.

## V. Five Concepts of Defining Vision

Over the years, I've looked at this thing. Remember, I told you a while back, I said that in the series of natural sevens that come through the Bible, you'll find in the Old Testament that there are seven men. I even gave them to you one night in Bible study and gave you the character headings of what they really represent. There are seven men in the Old Testament Bible. Those seven men typify everything that we should have in our lives that really make us the men or the women we need to be. Every aspect of whatever we are in our lives or what we should be is found in those men's story. If you take those seven guys and study their lives, you will find a model, a composite model of what your life and my life ought to be. It's as simple as that. You'll find that these old seven testament guys, as you lay the thing out and looked at it, you'll find every aspect of our lives. You'll also find five concepts in their lives. There's taught in a very incredible way five concepts of what it really means for us to have or how to define the vision.

The vision is simply—I listed it out very simply a number of years ago, and I've given it to you years ago, many of you, but there are many more people here now that weren't around then. But I look at the vision as simply being five things.

### 1. Hearing the inaudible.

Being able to talk to God in your relationship with God to hear things that the average person cannot hear. You know why I know that's important? Because there are places in the Bible where Jesus Himself says, "He that has ears to let him hear." He directs your listening ability to something He wants to say. We know that the average person misses what God says. So the first aspect of being a vision is being able to see or be able to hear what God is saying to you, which other people can't hear because they're too busy doing their own thing.

### 2. Seeing what's invisible.

You'll find many, many examples of this. Seeing what is invisible is just basically being able to see what God sees, what nobody else can see. Now, if you're going to ever work with people, and many of you are, and that's some of the things we're going to begin to work on this next year, but if any of you are going to work with people and you're going to be successful, you have to develop one trait. That is, when you see them, you don't see them as

they are. You see them as they could be. You see the potential that is in them that maybe is not evident to everybody else. You know where you get that example at? You get that example in many places, but you get it with Abraham and Sarah. Now, here's a case where Abraham is almost 99 years old, his wife well in her 80s. God shows up to them and says that they're going to have a child. Now, if some of you would come to me and say, "You know what, we're going to have a child," I'd say that's great. If you come up to me and say, "I'm going to have a child," we're going to run him to the hospital, and you're not going to have a serious heart-to-heart talk. Now, here's a man, 99 years old, and his wife's in her 80s, going into Toys R Us, Babies R Us, buying cribs, nurseries, toys, and all the accoutrements that go along with it. Everybody in the store is saying, "Oh, grandkids coming over." Sarah, 86 years old, saying, "No, I'm going to have a baby." Abraham puffing up his chest, saying, "Yep, I'm going to be a father." He's 99 years old. You see, when they walked out of that Toys R Us, Babies R Us, or the army surplus store, wherever they were getting their stuff, when they walked out of it, the world saw a crazy old man and old woman who thought they were going to have a child. God saw the nation of Israel. You see, you've got to look beyond what is the natural, and you've got to have the ability to see what is the supernatural. When I start to look at a deal with a person, male or female, whatever the case, I don't care where they've been, what they've done. I don't care what their problems are. I never care about where they have been. I never look at them within their problems. I look at them seeing the qualities that are in there, that if they'll just turn it over to God and let God do a little refashioning, remolding, a little polishing, buffing, and knocking out some dents, what could be there? Because if you're saved this morning, you have the ability to be everything that God wants you to be.

3. Touching what is intangible.

Reaching out and grasping a hold of promises in the Bible that nobody else can grasp. That's what really your Christian life is all about. It is reaching out and grasping the principle. That's my job. My job is to show you, to help you, to lead you, to guide you into reaching out and grasping on the concepts and principles that you normally couldn't get yourself, and then letting you draw them to you, and letting them change your life.

4. Believing the infallible.

Believing that you've got a book that God gave you that is everything in it that God wants you to have, that you can do everything in your life by and judge everything in the world by it and make it the number one database for your life. The number one database for your life on which you run all your data through that you come into contact with on your life and planet Earth.

5. Doing the impossible.

The result of hearing the inaudible, the result of seeing the invisible, the result of touching the intangible, and the result of believing the infallible will bring you to the place that in your life you will begin to do the impossible. That's exactly what God wants you to do. God saw an old man and an old woman and saw the nation of Israel come out of their loins. God will take you and your circumstances, whatever it is. Your abilities are not required. Your IQ, your aptitude is not required. All God looks for is your heart and the ability to see what God sees and to trust God with a vision of God to be everything that God wants you to be.

## VI. The Burden and the Watch

So that is a definition of the burden. Now I want to take the book of Habakkuk in the time that's left, and I want to show you how this burden works, how this vision works. For that, we've got to come to Habakkuk chapter one, verse one. We're going to start there. Every guy I ever heard preach on this, on a vision, always came to the place where he talked about that you had to have a vision. That's where he started. But that's not where you start. Chapter two breaks down how to have the vision and what the vision is, but it's chapter one that is the first step you've got to take.

The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see.

You see, all my life I've heard guys say, "If you're going to have a vision, you've got to have a burden. Every Christian needs to have a burden. Every Christian needs..." That's not what it says. It didn't say that he had a burden, though he did. What it says was, he saw the burden. It's not enough for you just to have a burden. You have to see and understand that the burden is God's burden, not your burden. I know all kinds of people were burdened with all kinds of things. It had nothing to do with God's burden. The vision starts with a burden, but it starts with you seeing and understanding what God's burden is. When you get to that point in your life, then you're on your way.

Now come over to chapter two. Oh, and chapter two is a killer. It's an absolute killer.

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.

Let's take that phrase and talk about it. Let's talk about, "I will stand upon my watch." I have a job as a pastor. That job is your watch care. I'm not any better than you. I'm not elevated to any spiritual position higher than you. But I have been given by God to watch for your souls. That's why Proverbs 27:23 says:

Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.

That's my job. My job is to look out for you spiritually. My job is to always keep a watch. In time, as you grow over the next year or so, you will learn what that means because you will be given someone that you have the watch care over. You'll be responsible for somebody individually, just as I'm responsible for somebody in a church concept. You will start to take the watch care of somebody else.

Now let me just say this to you here. I don't want to say this wrong. I want to say it right. So I need to slow up here a minute so I don't say something stupid, which I am prone to do many, many times. You know what? Over the last year or so, I have seen God do some tremendous things in some of your lives. You know what I look for in people? I look for things coming up in people's lives that they do that I can't teach you. There are some things about people, the ministry, and the Bible and people that I can't teach you. It only comes with what you do with what I do teach you. The Holy Spirit of God takes it inside and then He teaches you those things. But when I see them, I know that God is doing something in your life because you are getting

things that I can't teach you. I'm seeing those things manifest themselves in your attitude, in many areas of your life.

I know that as a pastor, I am limited in what I can do. I know that I can only teach you so much. I know there has to be a time when you on your own take what I give you and actually do something with God with it. So when that happens, I see coming out of your life things that I can't teach you manifesting themselves in your life about people, the ministry, attitudes, and all of those areas. I was telling my wife the other day, I was saying, "Wow, you know what? That is the greatest benchmark of knowing that God is changing people's lives when you begin to see them do things that you're not teaching them to do, that in essence you can't teach them to do, but the things that you have taught them are taking hold and producing what you can't teach in their life that only God has to do with them." I'm telling you what, to me, there is nothing more exciting than that. My job is to stand my watch.

It says, "I stand my watch upon a tower." I'll tell you, one of the greatest studies you'll ever take in all of your life in the Bible is to study that tower. You'll find some incredible things about it. You'll find in Psalms 18 that it's a high tower. You'll find in Psalms 61 that it's a strong tower. You'll find in Song of Solomon in chapter 4 that it's called the Tower of David. Yet when you look at those things and you study it, that tower represents your spiritual ability. I talked to you before we started the study the other night about the Middle East. I gave you Isaiah 40 where it talked about soaring with the eagles. I talked about the higher you get, the more you can see. It's the same concept. That tower represents your spiritual ability to see things above the rest and to see, to touch, to hear all the things of the vision that nobody else can see. You're either going to soar, build a tower of 20,000 feet, and you're going to see everything the way God sees it, or you're going to be a midget on a short chair for the rest of your Christian life and see nothing. There are a lot of God's people that are midgets on a short chair. They can't see anything but what surrounds them. They're going to stay that way. They don't have to stay that way, but they refuse to get on a watch on a tower. That has to be the concept. That tower represents your ability to get higher with God and see the things from God's standpoint as God sees them. That's why every time God met with somebody in the Old Testament to give them some great concept, the place that He chose for the meeting was on a mountain. Because it represented coming to the top of a pinnacle of a high place where you could see everything in a panoramic three-dimensional view that you couldn't see from ground level. That is your job and my job as a child of God. You never catch the vision. You never see what God sees till you get up high where God is. When you get to that point, then you have the ability to stand your watch on a high tower, a strong tower, a Tower of David, based and founded and grounded in the Word. Glory to God.

Then when you look at this thing, verse 1 is just loaded. He says, "I'll stand upon my watch and set me upon the tower." Then verse 1 says, "and will watch to see what he will say unto me and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd." Now look at that. You might have got the impression that you were on a high tower so you could look and see what everybody else was doing right or wrong. No, no, no. The first primary thing of this high tower is to look at yourself to see how you respond when you are reprov'd. Now I'm not talking about reprov'd by me. I'm a two-bit flunky. I'm talking about how you respond when God deals with you. That's what I'm talking about. I'm

talking about the first thing in your life of understanding the vision and grasping the vision is understanding your own weakness and looking at other people through you.

You see, it's real easy to be critical of other people. It's easy. You can see somebody you don't like, and you can go off on one of your famous tirade rages. But the bottom line is when you look at other people through your own problems, they don't look quite as bad when you put yourself in a scenario. That's why in dealing with people—and you have to learn this because some of you are going to begin to work with people—when you're dealing with people, you have to always look at yourself first before you look at them. You never use the Word of God to judge somebody else without judging yourself first. You know what it does? It balances the playing field. It keeps you from getting so high-minded that you start looking down at others and think you're up here when they're down here because, let me tell you something, none of us are up here. We're all down on the same bottom level with everybody else. You have to look at it through where you're at, your weaknesses, your problems, understanding if it wasn't by the grace of God, you'd be the same way. You have to never lose sight of that. When you do, then you'll wail on people all of your life. You'll talk about how terrible they are. You'll tell everybody else, "Stay away from them. They're terrible people." Everybody else is just standing around there scratching their heads saying, "Well, if you're saying that about them, I wonder what you're saying about me when nobody's around." You've got to run it through yourself first. That is the way it has to work. The watch on the tower and getting up high is for you to see your own imperfections so those imperfections will balance you out in your dealing with people who have problems. Because let me just say to you, people can irritate you. People can be frustrating. But you know what? Ain't none of us look too hot the first time God took a look at us. The truth of the matter is we can all be frustrating.

A little bit of, you know, it's like my kids are always asking me, they're always, we play this little game, they'll come up and they say, "Dad, am I a Mary or am I a Martha? Tell me, Dad, am I a Mary or I am a Martha?" Because you know Mary and Martha are the ones, the right kind of Christian, the other ones are the wrong kind of Christian. They're always saying, "Dad, am I a Mary or am I Martha?" I'll look at them and I'll say, "You know what? There's a little bit of Mary and a little bit of Martha in all of us." That's true. That's true. That's true. When you think you're one without the other, you're deceiving yourself. You're on this tower, and you're on this tower to see what God says to you and how you react when He says it. A mark of a strong Christian is not how well you know the Bible. It's not how well you pretend or how well you can preach. It's not the ordination certificate you got in your back pocket. That's not what makes a strong Christian. It's how do you react as a leader in the adversity of the ministry? Do you fold up like a broken accordion? Or do you hold the line understanding the concept of being on that tower? That you have a watch? That you stand on that watch and you look out there, but you look through yourself. When you look through yourself, you'll be more willing to cut other people some slack.

## VII. Writing and Running the Vision

Then the next thing in chapter two, verse two, he says this. He says, "You're on a watch, on a tower, and you'll watch to see what he will say unto me and what I shall answer when I am reproved."

And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.

He says, "Make it plain upon the tables." Now, I know I got a good concept of this because I look in the book of Revelation when Jesus is told to write. You know where God takes him? God takes him up. He takes him up to the third heaven, the highest place that you can get, and then tells him to write. You've got to get on that tower before you can see the vision and before you can write the vision. When you get up there and you start seeing things the way they really are through you and not in your preconceived concept that you're perfect and everybody else is wrong, then you can really understand what God wants you to do.

You write the vision. You make it plain. My job is to lay out the vision of God. My job is to see it, write it out to you, and then make it plain upon a table. It's a real simple formula. Sunday morning, I lay it out. Thursday night and through our studies throughout the week, I make it plain upon the table. That's why we set up tables. You thought because you'd have some place to write. No, no, no, no. We do that because the Bible doesn't make it plain upon it. You've got to have tables to make it plain. I'm kidding you. But that's what you do. You don't just, you've got to have a connection to everything you do. You don't just get up and rail on this on Sunday morning and then rail on something else Sunday night and then rail on something else Thursday night or Wednesday night, whenever, and then come back. You've got to have a plan. You've got to have a systematic concept that you're laying out the vision and then you're making it plain.

Hey, you know what? In our times together throughout the week, folks, when we're spending one-on-one time, you think you're getting stuff from me from the Bible. That's fine. Follow that deception as long as you can. My goal, I'm laying out the vision for you. I'm making it plain. I'm taking the big pieces of the Word of God and chipping them down to small pieces where you, when I leave, you understand it. You know why? That's how you get the vision. That's how you see it. You don't see it because I'm the pastor and I'm so smarter than everybody else. I stand up here and lay out all these great concepts. You see it because we work together as a team understanding that we all have a watch. We all have a responsibility, and the failure of this church, its success or failure, is going to be strictly based on the fact whether we grasp the vision or not and what we do with it.

Then he says, verse 2, "that he may run that readeth it." The running that he's talking about there, Paul defines in many places in the New Testament, that running of the race, the Christian life.

- 2 Timothy 2:5 says you are to run this race lawfully.
- 1 Corinthians 9:24 says that you are to run this race for a crown.
- Hebrews 12:1 says you are to run this race with patience.

It's a race that we all enter into the day we get saved, and we're racing not against each other. Boy, some Christians get that wrong. They think it's a race against my brother or my sister. No,

no, it's a race against time because we're running out of time. It's a race against the clock to fulfill the vision that God has for us in our life.

For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

Now here's the bad news again. This vision doesn't happen overnight. The Bible says it's for an appointed time. One of the hardest things for a young Christian is to be patient till he learns the Word of God. Because we all want it right now. I'm not saying that's not a bad thing. I want you to have a desire to devour the Bible. I want you to have a desire to learn everything about that book you can. But I also want you to understand that it takes time, and nothing happens overnight. There's a process. Those seven men I gave you in the Bible that are great study lessons for your own personal relationship with God, study them. You know what the bottom line is? Every one of them went through a process. Sometimes Moses took 40 years. Abraham took 18 years. There's a process by which you have to go through to get to that point.

Now yours won't be 40 years unless you want it to be 40 years. It doesn't have to be. But there are some things that you have to learn along the way of understanding this vision. You have the things you have to experience. There's some pain you have to go through. There's some rejection you have to learn to deal with. You have to have your feelings hurt to see how you respond to it. There are some things you have to fail in that you come back later and do a better job. God wants to see how we respond when God comes into our life and changes some things that we are just so sure this is the way that God wants us to go.

From that aspect, and here again, God has brought some tremendous people over the last year and a half and is continuing to do so. Those people, many of them that want to, in the next year, will begin to lay down the basic formulation of ministry, helping you understand how that you now can really fulfill the vision and understand in a greater way what God wants you to do.

## VIII. Providing Vision for Your Children

Now there's another aspect of this we've got to talk about. This is, there's nothing more important in the Bible to me than this. Now go back to Proverbs 29, because I really just pulled a verse out of context like we all do, and it was fine to do that. But I want you to see the context of this. I want you to see now the inspirational concept for you and for me.

Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul. Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.

Now the inspirational application of this is for you and for me as parents with our children. The "he" there up in verse 17 and the "he" in verse 18 in two places is the same person. In other words, as parents we need to provide a vision for our children. What I want to talk about right now for the next few minutes is I want to talk about every young couple in this church. We've got a bunch of young couples. The strength of our church is the young couples that keep coming in. You know, we have the older people that really have been around for a while, and it's our responsibility to take the younger ones and work with them. But let's face it, the older we get,

God has to have that fresh blood coming in all the time. It's found in young couples. This next year, I am fully committing our resources and everything that we do to getting into situations where we can work with people and help them in their family situations with their children or whatever the case, whatever the problem is.

But I want you to listen to what I'm going to say very carefully. I'm talking to the young. Now, let me just clarify this because I need to say this. I know that there are people that have come into our church that you didn't get plugged in until later in life, and maybe your kids were already grown up at the time you came in. At the time you really plugged into the Word of God, maybe your kids were up and gone, and you never had the benefit of anybody working with you. So, you know, the last thing I want to do is what I'm saying is that I want you to take that personally because I'm not talking to you. Let me say this: I don't care where you come in. I don't care where your kids are at. There's always something that you can do. It's never a time where you just throw your hands up and you say, "Well, I blew it, and there's nothing that I can ever do. I just made a mess out of things, and I'm just an idiot, and I just can't ever now." No, no, don't ever go there. There's always something you can do. I don't care what stage you're in and where you're at. There's always something that can be done. I will help you if that's what you want. I can lay it out and show you. I can detail it. That's not the problem. I'm not talking about that. I'm directing now to the young couples that are in our church, that you have little children or you're in the process of thinking about having children, or at some point in the future, you're going to get married and maybe have children. I'm talking to you.

I want you to understand this because what I'm about to tell you—and listen to me very carefully because there's nothing more in the Bible, I believe, more than this. You know what? If we as a church build a great congregation of 10,000 people, buy this whole place out and all the houses back here, buy across to here, put a tunnel under the street, have buildings all over the place, have 10,000 people, put missions all over the world, put out 1,000 missionaries, have 10,000 pastors, have 20,000 people coming every Sunday—and I mean just a real bottom line, baseline, last light, the last days with the Word of God—you know what? And we lose our kids. We have failed. I'm telling you right up front. I'm telling you right up front. Now I will help you however we've got to help, but I want you to understand about what I'm saying because we are on the verge of God doing some things with some people here that it's quite an incredible thing. The process is going right along on schedule. But you need to understand that we as parents need to provide a vision for our children.

Someday many of you will be involved in ministry. I don't like to use the word full-time ministry, and I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the fact that someday God is going to use you. I'm telling you right now, you're going to be working with people. The greatest pastoral training you can have and will ever get, the greatest training you can have as a pastor and the greatest pastoral training you can ever get, is the training that you get from being the pastor to your family. I don't know what else to tell you. Very frankly, if you don't have the ability to pastor that one, you don't have the ability to pastor the other one. That's just the way it is.

I'm telling you young couples, because I want you to grasp that I will help you. I will sit down with you. I will work it out. I will detail it out. I will show you how to provide a vision for your

child. I'll do everything but do it for you. I'll give it out where you couldn't miss it if you were blind, but you have to do the work. Providing a vision for—that's my job as pastor. My job as pastor is providing a vision for this church. Your job as pastor of your family is providing a vision for your family. It's as simple as that.

I'll tell you the truth. If this church fails, it won't be your fault. It's my fault. I mean, it's my fault. It isn't your fault. You people are good people. You'll do whatever I'd lead you to do. The concept of the nation of Israel and the church have two things that are always tied together. They're all dependent on leadership. When the leadership is right, the people are right. When a leadership is wrong, the people are wrong. It's just simply, it's not complicated. If this church makes it or fails, it'll be because of my leadership. I'll either lead you biblically or I'll lead you out into never-never land someplace. I'll lead you into false concepts or true concepts. I'll just tell you how nice you are and shake your hand and try to get out of what you can. Or I'll be honest with you and lay it out and try to help you along the way. It's as simple as that. It's as simple as that. You have to understand that we provide a vision for our children. That's what your job is. That is what your job is.

The Bible says in Psalms 127:3:

Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.

Every time I hear it quoted, it's "their heritage from the Lord." They're not a heritage from the Lord. They're a heritage of the Lord. The word heritage means inheritance. Then it says in the rest of that verse, "and the fruit of the womb is his reward," not your reward. It's God's reward. In other words, your family, young couples, listen to me. Your family is the proof text of your millennial inheritance. God has entrusted something to you as a steward. When you give it back to Him as the reward, I don't know what else to tell you. Like I said, I don't care where you're at. There's always something that you can do.

I'm talking to you couples that just have little kids, that you're thinking about having kids. Your kids are over in the nursery. You're dealing with them daily right now in all the different aspects of their lives. I don't want them to grow up when they're 15 and 16 years old and suddenly don't want to listen to you anymore, don't want to come to church. Now, this is how this thing works for you with this concept of a vision. A child cannot get the vision by himself. He cannot. You have to understand that you have to stand on a watch. You're the watch care of your child. You can't get caught up in all the other things in life that you want to do. I'm not saying you can't do them. I'm just saying you've got to understand. You've got to see the burden of the vision is the kids that God gave you. You have got to come to the point where you realize that you're standing on a tower. You need to watch for their attitudes. You need to watch the friends they hang out with. You need to watch the people they date. I'll tell you, if you come to the point that you can't come to your daughter, your son, and say, "You need not to date that person anymore," and they say, "Dad, you know best," you're in trouble because there was a time when you could say, "Son, don't touch that." You'd say, "Okay, Dad, I won't." You say, "Son, don't go over there." "Okay, Dad, I won't." Something happened between that point and this point. You didn't, the provision was not provided. I'm telling you guys, if this church is ever going to go anywhere, it's going to

have to come back with that. I thank God for the people, you know, that wherever you came in, that you've got a burden for your kids. You say, "You know what?" And you made a difference. But I'm talking to you ones that haven't raised them yet. It's easy to look back in hindsight and say, "Well, you should have did this, you should have did that." I'm talking about before you ever get there.

Hey, a burden for your child or your child becomes a burden. Most Christian couples, and this is not just Christian couples, this is true in society. The number one problems in marriages is finances. You know why? Because people get so caught up with everything that they want to have that they wind up living paycheck to paycheck. That's because of undiscipline. Anytime undiscipline rules in your life, God gets the short end of the stick. Because undiscipline leads to dysfunctional. It's as simple as that. Dysfunctional leads to the breakdown of the family. Just like most Christians live their lives from paycheck to paycheck, most Christians raise their kids from Sunday to Sunday with dysfunctionality in between. You have got to come to the point where you understand that you have to provide a burden.

I told you the story years ago, a guy came to me and he said, "Pastor, my kids are causing me problems in my home." I said, "You know what? We need to get one thing straight. Your kids are not causing problems in the home. Your kids are just revealing the problems that are already there." Kids don't cause problems. They just reveal the problems of dysfunctionality that is already functioning. I began to talk with him and I said, "You know what you need to do? You need to focus on going back and reclaiming those kids." That was one kid. You know what he said to me? He said to me, "Pastor, this kid doesn't understand what he's doing to my ministry." Why is it when you talk to people that you can look them in the eye, I could whisper in your ear, write it on a piece of paper, and it still goes ten feet over your head? I don't understand it. I just said the most important thing in your life is your ministry. He put that ministry aside and said, "No, no, my most important ministry is..." This guy was a great Bible teacher. Everybody loved him. He could just tickle your ear with Daniel. He had it all down, and he could just... But you know what? That was what he wanted. He wanted the admiration. You see, there's no glory in raising your kids. Nobody sees it. Usually the husband doesn't come home and say to your wife, "Good job." Usually the wife doesn't come over and say, "You did a good job." The way it goes is when your dad gets home, you're going to get whacked. Now it's my responsibility. I mean, it's just, it's not a glorious job. It really isn't. It's not a glorious job. There's no fanfare. Nobody says come to you and says, "Oh, you know," it's a very grungy, hard job. It is a job that both parents understanding the work I talked about, the balances and the strength, and you have to work together. It's a very hard concept, and it's not an easy thing to do. But you know what? It is the greatest training ground that you ever have. It's a class you have to pass before you go to the next grade. Even if you fail that path, whenever you start to do right, then you've got to begin to do whatever you're at in a chain of events. You have to begin to do what's right with it to make it work, to provide that vision.

You're standing upon a watch. You watch off of your tower, your children. Watch how they react. Watch how they go. I mean, the bottom line is that you watch how they... You know, I said that the tower is for you to see how you respond. Well, the tower is for you to see how your child

responds when you have to discipline them. When you discipline them five or six years old, you know what? It's a thing where, you know, a lot of times they get so disheartened because they think that fellowship is broken with mom or dad. That's a good thing. When they get 15 or 16 years old, mom and dad can tell them what they want to do, and it's sticking in your ear, "I'll do what I want to do." Someplace between point A and point B, you lose that concept of "I still want to have my fellowship with mom and dad just like I would when I'm 16, 17, just like I do when I'm five." Now, what happens? The vision, the vision, the vision, the vision. I told this guy, I said, "You need to forget about working with people. You need to go back and reclaim those kids." He could never get the concept that his first ministry was the most important. Hey, these items are absolutely non-negotiable in your life.

Then the next thing in chapter two, verse two, he says, "Write the vision, make it plain." Now, you say, "What does that mean?" It's a strange word in the English language, almost unheard of. It's called communication. It's called talking. It's called verbalizing. It's called laying out the concept. It's called about make it plain. Hey, do you have a plan for the vision of your kids? Maybe you've got kids and you're three or four years old. Have you sat down with your wife and said, "Let's make a plan. Let's find out how we're going to do this." Now, maybe you don't know how to do it. Maybe you could say there, you're sitting there saying, "Well, Bob, I'd like to do that, but I just don't know how." That's okay. That's okay. It's not a bad thing. It's never wrong that you don't know how. Hey, folks, I'm telling you, it's never wrong to say, "I don't know how." There's always somebody that can show you how. What's wrong is when you say, "I don't care. I don't want to."

I'll sit down with any couple, any mom, any dad. I'll sit down with anybody on your time, my time. You don't even have to buy me dinner. I'll sit down and I'll show you how to make a plan for your child. I'll help you with it. That's my job. It doesn't make you a bad person. It doesn't make you less spiritual than me. There are lots of things that I don't know how to do. I don't go moping in a corner and get mad because I can't play golf. I tried once. Once was enough. I almost killed a guy. I can hit the ball with such power. I had a guy tell me, "I have never seen anybody hit the ball with power." But it goes that way or that way. I ain't kidding you. I had five guys one time. I think Danny was there or Jason was there. I teed off on that thing, boy, and I whacked it. I'm telling you what, whatever, there's a guy coming, two guys coming down in a golf cart. I mean, it was like slow motion. You know how the great disaster movies, when they put it in slow motion, you know, the big shark is coming to get you, and it slows it down so you can see every bone crunch and the blood squirt and all that stuff. Well, this was slow motion. I actually saw this man's life passing before me. I mean, I whacked that sucker, and it was like that ball went slow. They were driving down there, and that ball went right into that cage of that thing, rattled around there, driving all over the road, man, and things like this. I went over and I said, "I am so..." When I went back, I said, "That's it. I ain't ever playing this again. For the safety of the world, I'm giving up golf." I just, you know what, that's okay.

Now, I promise you this. If I really wanted to play golf, and that was really a desire for me, I'd get some of you guys here now to play. I know you've got to hold your hands right. I know you've got to get the right posture, you know, and all those things. There are all kinds of ways to

learn to do that. That's what keeps the ball straight. Me, I'm a Nathaniel when it comes to golf. I just want to hit it as far as I can. I don't care what direction. I don't even want to get it in the hole. I want to see if I can kill that guy two miles over there, man. I want to drop that. I want to put a radio signal in it so that NASA picks it up when it goes across the thing. That's my concept of golf. You know what? I don't feel bad that I don't know how to play. There are a lot of things I don't know. Don't feel bad that you don't know how to put a plan together, but let somebody help you. Say, "Bob, I don't want to lose my kids. Bob, I want to do what's right. I want to be used of God." Be honest. Be open. Swallow the pride. There's no pride to it. Hey, I'm just like you. I struggle with things. I wasn't a perfect father. I had a perfect mother, wife, but I wasn't a perfect father. I wasn't. I'm not to this day. I have things I regret. I'm not going to stand up here for a minute and tell you that I've done everything right with my kids. I haven't. I'm not going to pretend that I'm with you, man. I struggled too. I'm just saying, yeah, let's struggle together because of the vision. What we've got to do.

He says, "for the vision is yet for an appointed time." The work you do when they're three, four, five, six years old will produce results when they're 16, 17, and 18. I know as parents when they're four, five, and six, you want to pull your hair out and shoot them. I know that. But be patient. Be patient because he says at the end it shall speak. The end result of your children will speak. It'll speak volumes about your relationship with God. It'll speak volumes about your discipline. It'll speak volumes about where you're at. He says, "wait for it." Hold the line with him. God didn't lie to you when He said in Proverbs 22:6:

Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

The vision is for an appointed time. It takes a process to get there, and you may struggle. Not every kid is the same. Don't make the mistake if you have two or three kids that you start saying, "Well, why aren't you like this one?" They're all different. I've got three dogs. They're all different. They live together. They're dumb dogs. They don't talk. They eat and do what the dogs do out in the yard, but they don't talk. They're not smart. They go by, but you know what? Even in their dog dumbness, they have personalities. They do. They're not the same. It isn't like, "Well, I mean, when this one barks, he says something." When you learn that dumb dogs that don't have souls can have different personalities and can be different in temperament and different kinds, what do you think kids are? Now you can get away with raising your dogs the same. I mean, if you name them all the same, you're going to have a problem because they're all going to come at the same time, but you can't with your kids.

The vision for your—just as my job is to provide a vision for this church and to help you realize that vision—your job is to provide a vision for your families, and the key to being used in ministry down the line is keeping everything in its right priority.

## IX. Finishing the Race

He says in Hebrews 12:1:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

You know, last week I read an article. It was one of the best articles I ever read. It was about one of the Boston marathons. I'm not sure which one it was. I didn't get into it that much, but the guy was writing, and he was talking about that. He was a sports writer, and he was talking about the concept of the marathon and the guy that won the marathon. He won it in like two hours, and the marathon is 26 point some miles. He ran it in two hours and something, which was almost the world record. It's incredibly fast. I mean, I couldn't get that fast. We had a golf cart. Two hours and some minute, and the guy that came in last ran it in seven hours and 40 minutes. The guy made the parallel between the two, and he says, "You know, when the first guy came across the finish line, everybody was there. The TV cameras were there. The news people were there. Screaming crowds were there, and everybody was cheering as this guy came across and set a new record of two hours and whatever minutes it was." He says, "Six hours, seven hours later, however long it was, when the last guy came across, nobody was there. TV crews were gone. News people were gone. They were tearing down the stands, tearing down the booth. Hardly nobody even recognized that he came across." He said, "You know what?" He says, "We as humans are really strange." He says, "We look at the guy that won and we look at the guy that lost, and we never look at the fact that there was a common denominator between the both. That was the determination to finish the race."

I looked at that, and I thought to myself, "You know what?" I took it one step further, and I said, "You know what? Both of those guys, one won it. One came in last. But they both finished." The thing that they both had to have, one had to have with the win, and the other one had to have with the finish, was a vision for the race. I'm going to tell you something. This race of life, the Judgment Seat of Christ, I don't expect to win it. I don't even expect to come in in record time. I don't. I'm not under no illusions. I know my weaknesses. I know how I get sidetracked. I sure know I am far from the greatest Christian or any great Christian in the world. I know I struggle with things just like everybody else does. I have no illusion that I'm going to come in first place, second place, be in the first 10 of the first 100. But I am sure of one thing: I will finish the race. It may be on my knees. I may crawl across the line. I may come across with my knees bloodied, my elbows bloodied, and I mean, can't and just beat to pieces. But I'm telling you, I will finish the race. "The last shall be first and the first shall be last." It doesn't matter to God where you finish. It only matters to God did you finish. That's the bottom line. The only way you finish is to see the vision.

I'm not asking you to be super Christian. I'm just asking you to see the vision. I'm asking you that you have said, "This is my church. I want to learn here. I want to grow here. I want to raise my families here. I want to get the stuff for my kids. I want to be used in ministry. I want to learn. I want a better marriage. I want a better relationship with God." All I'm asking is that God's people see that, take that, and then make that vision their vision, and then get into this race. I don't care where you finish. I just want you to finish. Because in that day when you get across the finish line, everybody will be waiting for you. It won't be only the number one guy that comes across.

It'll be everybody that finishes. That's why a vision is absolutely incredibly important to your life and to my life. To the lifeblood of this church. To your family. That's why my job is simple. My job is to keep that vision before you. My job is to keep that vision alive. My job is to find out 10,000 ways to say the same thing. That you'll get the concept in time. That you'll feed off the concept. That concept will become something that goes right down to the core of your own personal life and into your own family. I'll do my job. You have to do yours. Together we do the job. We run the race. We won't all finish first, but we all finish. It's as simple as that.

That's why the concept of ministry where we're at right now is so vitally important. It's time to take the next step. It's time to continue to work with people that come in that want to get to that point. It's time to keep and doing whatever we've got to do to cover all the bases. That's why God has blessed this church and will bless the church. I go back to my original thing. Back to the good news. You are great people. I believe everybody in here has the heart that wants to do what God wants to do. The real issue is courage to get in the race. So many times you're afraid of not finishing first that you never get in it. Take the pressure off of you. I ain't going to finish first, but I am going to finish. You know what? Hang back with me. We'll finish together, but we'll finish. Every head bowed and every eye closed. Father?