

* The Heights Baptist Church *

* Topic: Our Vision * 1 Corinthians 9:18-27 * 2/23/25 *

MAIN POINT

As a church, we have been commissioned to go and make disciples of all nations. Part of completing this commission God has for us is to sacrifice our “rights”, comforts, wants, and preferences for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The Heights Baptist Church has personalized this with the following vision statement: “As we move toward 2035, The Heights Baptist will be a church focused on Kingdom multiplication: of disciples, of pastors, of churches, of missions.”

INTRODUCTION

Can you think of a time when you received a somewhat complex task you had to accomplish at home, work, or elsewhere? What kinds of things were involved in successfully completing the task?

Answers will vary, but some thoughts would be having defined goals, a plan on how to accomplish those goals, assigned roles to the individual contributors, and equipping the individual contributors to be able to successfully complete their tasks. Oversight on how the plan is progressing is also required, along with a willingness to change the plan as new information becomes available.

A “vision statement” held by an organization describes what the organization wants to achieve as it moves into the future. It defines how it will accomplish its purpose or mission. How important is it for local church leaders to have a vision for how they want to accomplish God’s will through their church?

Without direction, it would be very easy to just spin our wheels and hinder what we should be accomplishing for God’s kingdom as a church. A church can be taking part in a lot of activities, but if we aren’t having an impact on the great commission, we are not accomplishing what Jesus has called us to do.

Note to study leader: The current sermon series is taking a three-week look at our church. The topics that are being discussed are our mission, our vision, and our budget. In today’s lesson, we will be discussing the new vision statement at the Heights: “As we move toward 2035, The Heights Baptist will be a church focused on Kingdom multiplication: of disciples, of pastors, of churches, of missions.”

Proverbs 29:18 says, “Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.” Why do you think it’s easier for us to obey God if we know where He is leading us and what He requires of us?

The Hebrew word translated as “prophetic vision” can be translated as a divine communication. The word translated as “cast off restraint” means to let go. So, this verse warns us that when people lack vision from God’s word, they tend to let go of moral restraints, which leads to a loss of blessing from God. Knowing what God wants to accomplish through us helps us stay focused on walking in obedience with Him.

Note to study leader: For this week’s lesson, we will again use the “Think, Pair, Share” method to help participants digest our new vision statement. When using this method, have the class break up into small groups, perhaps into groups of four to six people per group. Then have the individual groups think about and discuss their ideas about our new vision statement. Finally, have the groups come together again in one larger group while having assigned small group spokespeople share the ideas the individual groups have come up with the entire class.

UNDERSTANDING

SMALL GROUP TIME

Write the new vision statement on the white board. Then break the class up into smaller groups of around four to six people per group. Have each group assign a spokesperson, and then have each group think about and brainstorm about how we as individuals and as a lifegroup can help carry out our vision, to “be a church focused on Kingdom multiplication: of disciples, of pastors, of churches, of missions.” (we will provide worksheets for the discussion groups that will include the Vision Statement and these 4 questions.)

Four questions to consider are:

1. How can we as individuals and as a lifegroup help our church be better focused on kingdom multiplication, specifically in the area of making disciples?
2. How can we as individuals and as a lifegroup help our church be better focused on kingdom multiplication, specifically in the area of developing pastors?
3. How can we as individuals and as a lifegroup help our church be better focused on kingdom multiplication, specifically in the area of planting churches?
4. How can we as individuals and as a lifegroup help our church be better focused on kingdom multiplication, specifically in the area of being focused on missions?

After about 10 minutes, meet back together as a large group and have the spokespeople from each group share what their group has come up with for each of the four questions. (Adjust this amount of small group time based on how actively the groups are still discussing these topics.)

TIME IN THE SCRIPTURES

Note to study leader: *In the remainder of today’s lesson, we will be looking at how Paul’s vision altered his attitude about life as he expressed it in 1 Corinthians 9. It is likely that the “think, pair, share” part of this lesson may take up most of the class time. If time is limited, you may need to just cover 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, or to jump directly to the Application section of this lesson.*

In 1 Corinthians 9, we see that Paul understood that he had freedom as a Christian. And this freedom was especially clear to him, since he had previously been a pharisee bound to the Mosaic Law. But even after being freed from the Law, Paul was committed to giving up his own interests and “rights” in order to focus on winning others for Christ.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-23

Why was Paul free? What was he free to do, and how did he choose to use his freedom?

Paul was free on account of Christ. He was free from the demands and burdens of the Law and free to live out his calling. Paul knew freedom was not just a license to do what one wanted. Instead, Paul saw it as a liberty to be what God wanted him to be for the sake of others.

What strategy is Paul using when helping others grow closer to Jesus? How can we apply this today?

What does it look like to be “all things to all people”? What does it not look like?

The gospel is worth our personal sacrifice. Paul was willing to let go of his preferences and desires in order to preach the gospel where it had not yet been heard. At the same time, Paul knew the essential elements of the gospel that could never be compromised on. He was willing to do what it took to ensure the way he approached people to share the gospel would not be a hinderance to their hearing the gospel.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

Paul used a couple of sports analogies to make a point. What point was he making when he talked about a runner going into strict training prior to running a race?

What point was Paul making when he talked about a boxer?

An undisciplined competitor will not win. Paul disciplined himself with a purpose: to win others to Christ. Our goal is not to earn righteousness before God, but actively abide in Christ the true vine, and intentionally focus on sharing Christ with others and doing our part to help fulfill the great commission.

Note to study leader: When Paul talked about being disqualified from the prize, he wasn't saying he could lose his salvation because of a lack of good works. Otherwise, grace would not be grace. But we will be rewarded for our works at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 2:10-15), and this reward will be lost if we squander our time on earth on temporary things that don't matter.

APPLICATION

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ PROV. 16:3, LUKE 24:28, PROV. 21:5, AND PROV. 3:5-7.

When coming up with a vision statement for our lives or our church, how do we balance making plans with trusting God rather than our plans and understanding?

Making wise decisions and setting goals is important. But as we plan, we need to be seeking God's kingdom first, and we need to be planning in light of God's revealed will. Our plans also need to be based on love for God and love for people, not on selfish ambition. We also need to listen for God's direction, even when His direction seems contrary to our natural logic. And we need to hold on to our plans lightly, being willing to change them as God shows us a new direction that He wants us to take (Acts 16:6-10).

“Fear arises when we imagine everything depends on us.” Elizabeth Elliot

Focus on the sermon today about the vision of our church, and ask yourself, “Am I involved in what God is doing through our church? Is there a way I can better serve the church with my time, talents, resources, and spiritual gifts?”

Considering the list we built based on the four questions in our small group time, what specific things can we do as individuals and as a lifegroup to better carry out our vision as a church?

PRAYER

Thank God for His revealed will in the scriptures, and for the vision that this gives us as His people. Pray that God would help us as individuals and as a church to better understand His vision for us. Pray that He would give us the strength and wisdom to be willing to give up our “rights” and become all things to all people, so that by all possible means we might save some.

COMMENTARY

1 Corinthians 9:18-27

9:18-19. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul used the occasion of discussing Christian freedom to address accusations that had been made against him concerning his authority as an apostle. His defense, however, was to apply the principle of putting others' well-being ahead of one's own. As a Christian, Paul was free from all people, meaning that he was not bound to any particular human agenda. Paradoxically, his freedom in Christ meant he had willingly become a slave to all. His life of freedom was governed by the spiritual needs of other people. The goal of his freedom was to win more people to Christ.

9:20. Paul offered two examples of the way he practiced Christian freedom. First, when he was among Jews he respected their laws and customs. The purpose of this accommodation was to avoid engaging in constant disputes over traditions in favor of introducing his fellow Jews to the gospel.

9:21. When Paul was among Gentiles, those outside the law, he didn't continue to engage in Jewish traditions that meant nothing to his audience and could distract his hearers from Christ. On occasion, he might even join in observing certain Gentile customs as long as they didn't involve sinful behavior. Paul was after all under the law of Christ. He considered himself free to act in this way, but he never did so merely for the sake of exercising his freedom. His rationale was to win those outside the law to faith in Christ.

9:22. Paul's overarching purpose was to save some. He came from a background in which some people were considered to be beyond hope or concern. Paul was not advocating insincerity in behavior, doing anything unchristian, or "watering down" the gospel. His accommodations were social and personal, not theological. He tried to respect other perspectives so that he could approach all kinds of people with the gospel in a manner that made sense to them.

9:23. The gospel motivated Paul and compelled him to reach others. In doing so—that is, in becoming a slave to all—Paul also became a partner in the gospel's benefits.

In this context, weak is best understood in the general sense of being spiritually needy. Paul's intention was to reach all sorts of people with the gospel. The overarching purpose was to save some. Paul came from a background in which some people were considered to be beyond hope or concern. As a Christian, however, Paul understood that God loves all people, so all people became Paul's concern too.

Paul was not advocating insincerity in behavior, doing anything unchristian, or "watering down" the gospel. His accommodations were social and personal, not theological. He tried to respect other perspectives so that he could approach all kinds of people with the gospel in a manner that made sense to them. The gospel motivated Paul and compelled him to reach others.

9:24-25. Paul then used an illustration from life in first-century Corinth. Athletic contests were common in the Greek world. Pointing to his own example, Paul said he did not run aimlessly. He kept his eyes on the finish line and his mind on the prize, for the honor of the Lord Jesus Christ.

9:26-27. Paul also used an illustration from boxing to enforce his point. In ancient Greek boxing, the fighters sat on stones before one another and fought until one of them died. Paul said he did not aimlessly flail the air. He constantly kept in mind the purpose of the fight—to win, to live, to bring life rather than death.

Unlike an undisciplined competitor, Paul disciplined himself for the fight. The word translated discipline actually means "to beat" or "to wear out." He said he pounded his own body and brought it into submission to his purposes.