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THE VISION AND THE JOURNEY

Where there is no vision, the people perish (Proverbs 29:18 KJV). These are familiar words to many Christians. Most modern translation say: *Where there is no prophetic vision, the people cast off restraint*. Given the many meanings and connotations of the Hebrew word translated as "perish" (uncover, make naked, expose, dismiss) the modern translation is probably the more accurate. It definitely makes the passage more relevant for our purposes. *Many, perhaps most, Christian men who fail in their efforts to restrain their sinful sexual impulses do so, in part, because they have no vision for who they are to become as God's sexual men*. If we have no vision, what are we left with? Ponder this question for a moment. We are left with a series of "don'ts". We are left with the law, and the law alone is powerless to change us. We are saved through grace, not through the law, and to form and hold onto a Spirit inspired vision of who we are to become as sexual men is to appropriate (take for oneself) God's grace.

more accurately trans.

think this
see you
may want to
investigate
Ex. 32:25
II Chron.
28:19

Certainly
Heb
word
para -
same
word as
in
Ex 32:25

see II Chron. 28:19 = allow depravity to spread,

For by grace you have been saved through faith (Ephesians 2:8). The vision proposed here is to be a manifestation of our faith, faith in the power of God to fulfill His purposes in every aspect of our lives—including our sexuality.

When we form this vision and cling to it, every remembrance of the vision, even in moments of failure—perhaps especially in moments of failure—becomes a declaration of the glory and the power of God. The formation of the vision and holding fast to it is an act of worship.

This is a key message of this book. You might want to go back and read the preceding paragraphs over again. Much of what follows will be a development of this message.

OUR STRUGGLE WITH THE LAW

God gave us the law, and so the law is good. He gave us a specific law regarding our sexuality—it should find expression only in the one flesh union of husband and wife—and this law has never changed. But the law was never enough, as was shown ultimately in God sending His Son to do what the law could not do.

If you have struggled with sexual sin, you are probably only too aware of the shortcomings of the law. In Regeneration we have come to see some Christian men who struggle with sexual sin as being like men taking rides in an amusement park. Some men ride the merry-go-round; they sin, repent, confess, and then in a short while sin again, repent and confess. Round and round; they are going nowhere. For other men, like many of the sexually addicted men to whom we minister, it is a roller coaster ride; climb slowly up to a peak of victory and then come crashing down again into the pit of sin and despair. Then they slowly again rise to their peak, only to come crashing down again. For some it

is like the haunted house; their sexuality is a dark place filled with ugly images and perversions that at once excite and disgust them, fantasies they would have been too ashamed to share with anyone.

When my older daughter was about four years old, I had to make a business trip to New York, so my wife drove me along with our daughter to the railroad station. After dropping me off and driving away, my daughter burst into tears. “You left Daddy at the train station”. The only kind of train she was familiar with was the little one at the carnival or amusement park that went around in a circle and brought the passengers back to where they had gotten on. She expected me to take my ride, get off the train and go back home with them. She had no concept of a train that picked you up in Baltimore and dropped you off in New York. At four, she could not even envision New York.

So it is with so many men. They cannot imagine any other kind of sexuality other than one which went round and round in the circle of sin and repent, sin and repent, sin and repent. They have no concept of a growth in sexuality that would take them forward to a desirable destination. They have no concept, because they have never formed a vision for that destination.

When we have no vision for who we can become as sexual men, quite naturally our eyes are focused on past failures, and our image of ourselves, our very identity, becomes formed by those failures. As regards our sexuality at least, our identity is likely that of a weak man, one who is powerless to not keep falling back into his sin. Unfortunately, to live according to our perceived identity is in our very nature. What we believe about ourselves is how we live, and so seeing ourselves as men for whom sexual sin is inevitable, we do, in effect, cast off restraint.

But we don't have to just look back. God calls us to look up. *I lift my eyes up to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth* (Psalm 121:1-2). Surely, we remember our sins, and we would be foolish to not recognize our vulnerabilities, but life in the Spirit is meant to be one of hope, and we do have all the reason for hope. But we need to know what it is we hope for, who it is we can become.

THY KINGDOM COME

In the prayer that Jesus taught us we say, *Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*. I believe that these words are both a prophecy and a plea. His Kingdom will come indeed, but not fully until Jesus returns. But our cry as Christians is that we might experience His Kingdom right now in this life—and we do. He gives us little glimpses of it. Sometimes we experience it in worship. We experience his Kingdom in those unexpected moments when faced with temptation, we clearly and unequivocally say no. We experience it in those rare moments when we feel that all is right with the world—and with us.

Becoming the sexual men God called us to be is to experience Kingdom living. It is to have the Kingdom of God take over a significant part of our manhood. Our vision will

have us walking in the Kingdom of God, in perfect obedience, in perfect peace, in perfect joy—as sexual men.

THE VISION AFFIRMS THE JOURNEY

Does forming the vision assure us that we will experience fulfillment of the vision in this life? No, not fully. I have a vision for myself as a sexual man that has not yet been totally reflected in my life. I live near Interstate 95, and travel it regularly to go to the Regeneration office or elsewhere. It is entirely possible that on one of these trips I could get crushed under the wheels of an 18-wheeler. If this happened, I would surely die with some unresolved sin issues in my life. However, I know that I, like other Christians in such circumstances, will be raised up sinless. How God does this is one of the mysteries of our faith. Perhaps it has to do with something like purgatory; perhaps it has to do with our living outside the realm of time when we die. How God does this doesn't matter all that much, but what does matter is the constant message that we get from Scripture, that we hear spoken prophetically in the church, that is burned into our hearts when we spend time with the Lord; that we are to seek to grow in righteousness every day of our lives. This is what the vision is about; God and His righteousness becoming manifested in our lives. *But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness* (Matthew 6:33).

The vision is for the future, for a place where we have not yet arrived. This means that we are on a journey. The conscious remembrance that we are on a journey, when it finds a home in our hearts, can shift our identity from that of being men who fail, men who are weak, to men who are *on the way*, men who are *becoming*. With our eyes on the goal of God's righteousness—whether it is to be experienced in this life or the next—we move ahead boldly with a clear destination in mind. Our boldness is bolstered, not by the strength we recognize in ourselves, but by the hope that is in us because of Jesus Christ and *His* power.

This sense of journey is so vital because it makes purposeful and even exciting the struggles that come our way. When we fall, knowing that we are on a journey, we can be like the Psalmist: *Though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong* (Psalm 37:24). We don't have to have "arrived". We can dust ourselves off (repent), get up and continue onward. We don't vacillate between being the victor and the vanquished in our sexual struggles. Not having to have arrived yet, when we do fall short, we aren't so filled with the shame or disgust that in many men, contributes to the sin-repent cycle.

The journey is what matters in our day to day lives, but how can we make the journey if we don't know where we are going. We need the vision.

THE VISION AND THE JOURNEY HELP US AVOID THREE CRIPPLING ERRORS

In our ministry we regularly encounter Christian men who hold to one or more of three false beliefs, any one of which can keep them from growing as God's sexual men. Forming a vision and recognizing that a road is to be traveled to fulfill that vision could do much to eliminate these false beliefs.

At the time I wrote the first draft of this book, I was calling it *More Victories*. When I was nearing completion of the draft I presented the ideas that formed the book at a workshop at a national conference, and I kept referring to our goal of experiencing “more victories.” At the end of the class, a young man came forward quite agitated. He objected strongly to the concept of more victories. He believed that it sold God short, and that it was actually harmful, leading us to settle for less than God intended. He felt that it could even help us to justify our sins. By his reckoning, the title of my book, and the workshop should be “Total Victory.”

The young man was expressing a “holiness” doctrine, one that has surfaced in the church from time to time. While it has never gained widespread acceptance throughout the broader church, holiness thinking is not all that uncommon among individual Christians. It declares that we can experience total victory in this life not only over all sin, but even over sinful desires.

The young man’s fear was that to settle for more victories meant to accept some failures, which meant accepting some level of sin in our lives. This could be valid for a shallow believer, but I don’t believe it is valid for most committed Christians. A popular preacher of a few years back, Dr. Harry Ironside, who had gone through a holiness time in his early walk with the Lord—and found it to be a time of shame, self-hatred and hypocrisy—addressed this point. “I have found a far higher standard maintained by believers who intelligently reject the eradication [holiness] theory than among those who accept it. Quiet, unassuming Christians, who know their Bibles and their own hearts too well to permit their lips to talk of sinlessness and perfection in the flesh, nevertheless are characterized by intense devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, love for the word of God, and holiness of life and walk.”⁸

“Holiness” and any perfectionist belief can cause us to focus too much on our own perfection and absolute purity, and too little on the source of all that is good in us, Jesus Christ. Dr. Ironside not only experienced this, but finding that his life fell so far short of such perfection started to doubt, first his own salvation, and eventually the very truths of the Gospel.

The second error that we can fall into, if we fail to have a vision or see that we are on a journey towards the fulfillment of that vision, is much more common. I hear it expressed regularly in men who say words to the effect that, “I’ll have these struggles until the day I die.” Having struggled for purity and having failed regularly, sometimes for years, these men have given up hope that life will ever be any different. If not in actual despair, they show an almost fatalistic attitude.

How this can perpetuate sin is easy to see. Sin is seen as inevitable. They don’t believe they can ever get off the merry-go-round.

The idea that non-marital sexual acting out is inevitable was one of the seeds that led certain denominations to reject historic Christian teaching on sexuality. I remember

⁸Ironside, Harry, “Holiness – the False and the True”, by www.gotothebible.com

sitting in the office of an Episcopal bishop hearing him say, “We know what the Bible says about sex, but we also know that almost nobody actually lives that way”. Later I found out that this bishop was being unfaithful to his wife. Holding the form of religion, but denying its power, he had found justification for his own sin.

A more basic problem I have with this attitude that sexual sin is inevitable is that no one can say with any degree of certainty that they will struggle with a specific sin for the rest of their lives. Nothing in scripture supports the view that we will never achieve victory over a specific sin. To the contrary, victory over sins is expressed throughout scripture. Although we almost certainly will have struggles with some sins for all of our earthly lives, growth in the Lord is going to be marked by victories in some areas, and in some of those victories we will no longer even desire that which had such power to attract us in the past. I have struggled with sin through all of my Christian life, and with lust from time to time, but the desire to have sex with men, a desire that controlled my life for years, and almost destroyed my marriage, is totally gone.

But this is just my experience. I have no basis on which to universalize it. Many of the same sex attracted men to whom we minister, men who are leading solid Christian lives, still have to contend with these desires. But just as we should not expect everyone to experience our specific victories, we should not universalize our ongoing struggles. With humility we have to admit that we don’t know how far God is going to take any individual in any specific area of his life, and we should certainly not hold tight to the idea that our next ten years of life will be just like the last ten. To do so denies the journey and shortchanges the power of God.

One more problem I have with the “I will always have this problem” belief is that it keeps us from seeing, or from striving for, those incremental steps that mark our journey on the way to fulfilling our vision. If we don’t believe that something can happen, it is unlikely to happen, or we will fail to recognize it when it does happen. Then, when small victories occur, we will not see them, or we will dismiss them, not letting them become what they should be, stepping stone to a greater victory that lies ahead.

The third error is especially common among us who consider ourselves evangelicals. It is likely present in prominent evangelical leaders who, while doing great things for the Kingdom, including leading many people to Christ, are leading personal lives marred by ugly sexual sin. Typically, these are born again people who have had a valid conversion experience, and they recognize that they are not immune to sin, that further sanctification is needed. But in their heart of hearts, they have judged themselves as good people, good people who just happen to have “this problem.” Many of us have a tendency to do this to some extent. In judging ourselves, we place all of our goodness on one side of the scale, and this sin on the other, and with the good far outweighing the bad, in our pride, we declare ourselves okay. This gives us the rationale to not take, or to delay taking, the drastic steps that are needed to deal with our sin. I think most men reading this book should examine their hearts in this area. Have you minimized the gravity of your sexual sins because, essentially, you are a good man. This can be a terrible trap.

should examine their hearts in this area. Have you minimized the gravity of your sexual sins because, essentially, you are a good man. This can be a terrible trap.

With the first error, we deny sin. With the second one, we see it as inevitable, and with the third error, we tolerate it. The conscious awareness and frequent remembrance that we are on a journey towards freedom and righteousness and wholeness is an antidote to each of these errors. And a focus on the journey will have a great steadying influence on us, one that will keep us from flailing around between hope and hopelessness, between determination and resignation.

“THE NORMAL CHRISTIAN LIFE”

On any long journey—and the one proposed here will almost certainly be long—we need to be sure we have the resources necessary to sustain us on the journey. On this journey, our most essential resources will all be found in what I call “the normal Christian life.” This journey is not just for the super-Christian, for the saint who is packed and ready to go on the farthest corners of the world to spread the Gospel; it is for every man who day by day does those things that Christians do—or should do.

What is this normal Christian life? By and large it is what you would expect it to be, a life that includes generous measures of worship in a local church, hearing, reading and studying God’s Word, fellowship with other believers, Christian service, and for many of us regular receipt of the sacraments. It is also marked by two constants; significant and consistent one-on-one time with the Lord, and regular confession. These last two parts of the journey are so vital for a man on a journey so let’s take a look at them:

Quiet times have been absolutely essential in every part of my growth in Christ. We experience God in worship, in the sacraments, in Christian fellowship, in service offered in His name, in many ways. But for a man on a journey, concentrated, often extended, quiet and secluded time with Him is essential. It is in our regular quiet times with God that we are most likely hear Him speak into our hearts. It may be words of admonition or correction, affirmation or encouragement, warning or direction, but we must spend time with Him to hear Him. I will share more about this in Chapter 8, when I address how our hearts are changed.

Regular confession of sins is also essential to the journey. In fact, if there is little or no confession, there will be little or no progress on the journey. At times on the journey we will fall—there is no doubt about this—and we need to be forgiven. Confession is our means of obtaining God’s forgiveness. Without forgiveness we stay in bondage to our sins, our sins accumulate, and they will start to weigh us down spiritually so that we can make little or no progress on our spiritual journey.

Confession is the verbal acknowledgment of our sin, and it can take several forms. We can confess directly to God and God alone, which is what most of us do with most of our conscious sins. We can confess to a brother (or sister) in Christ, often to someone to whom we are very close, or with whom we have an accountability relationship. And we can confess our sins to someone in authority in the church such as a pastor, an elder, a

priest. Of course whenever we confess our sins to another person, we are also confessing them to God. A sacramental confession in the Catholic or certain other churches would fall under the third category.

Unless your church teaches, or God has led you to believe, that every sin must be confessed to another person, usually the severity or persistence of the sin will determine what kind of confession is best. There is a Biblical warrant for each:

-If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Here, there is no mention of another person hearing our confession.

-Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed (James 5:16). This implies that confession is among regular members of the body. No authority role is mentioned. What is indicated, however, is that confession to another can have a life changing effect; *you will be healed.*

-If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven (John 20:23). This powerful authority was given to the apostles. Jesus was not speaking publicly to all of His followers. This would suggest that confession to a church authority has special importance and possibly special power.

I have used all three forms of confession in my life to my great benefit.

Our journey to becoming God's sexual men is longer than any marathon. On the way, our time with the Lord feeds us feeds our souls, and our confessions and God's forgiveness are like the cups of water passed to a marathon runner; they are vital.

OUR MOTIVATION

There are two things that will prompt a man to set out on a journey. One is that he is discontent with where he is now and he wants to get away from his current surroundings. The other is that a certain destination seems very attractive to him and he is drawn to seek it out. One or both of these situations must be present or he has no motivation to set out on the journey. If he knows the journey is going to be difficult or treacherous, the current situation must be quite bad or the destination particularly attractive to provide sufficient motivation for him to set out on the journey.

Most men who seek help through our ministry do so because they are very unhappy with where they are. They are Christian men who are sinning sexually with some regularity, and they don't like being in that place. Your making the decision to read this book could indicate that this is where you are.

The desire to put sin behind us is a godly and right one, but it is not the better one if we are to ultimately complete a difficult journey. If our journey takes us over rocky roads and rough terrain—and the road toward sexual purity promises us plenty of obstacle—I

believe that holding fast to the vision of what lies ahead will give us greater endurance to complete the trip.

The Jewish people in their exodus from Egypt illustrated this. They had both motivations. They were given a vision of a promised land, a land of milk and honey, a land where they would be masters of their own destiny, but the fact that this is mentioned very seldom after they left Egypt indicates that their primary motivation to set out on their journey was the terrible things they had to endure in Egypt. The Egyptians *ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service* (Exodus 1:13-14). At one point, the Egyptians ordered that all their male babies be killed at birth. Their lives were not their own.

After 430 years in Egypt, God sent them Moses and he led them out of Egypt. But what happened? After less than two months of freedom—after God had worked all of the miracles to secure their liberation—they started to grumble and wonder if they wouldn't have been better off staying in Egypt. The problems of the day loomed so large, and the memory of their past suffering was starting to fade. As a result, they were about to give up the journey.

How similar it can be with our sexual struggles. How conscious we are of the ugliness of our sin, of our shameful weakness right after we have yielded to lust. Within seconds of turning off the computer or wiping away the semen, disgusted with himself, a man vows to do differently in the future, to set out on a new life journey. But two or three days later powerful temptations come upon him, and they loom so large and past misery that he felt after his last episode of sexual sin has started to fade, so he is set up for another fall. In all situations the present seems to exert an unreasonably large power over us. In the sexual area, for reasons we will explain later, this is especially true.

This is the moment that we need to grasp hold of the future, what can and might be. Man will do great things for positive reasons—out of the motivation of love or of obtaining something he greatly desires. He will do more for positive reasons than he will for negative. Even the fear of hell or separation from God proves not to be much of a motivator for most people. But for the love of God, or our wife, or our children, we will go to enormous lengths. It is the same for something we passionately desire, as shown by the years of training or practice that the athlete or musician will go through or the sacrifices the businessman or professional will make to achieve his goal.

If we have a well formed vision of who we can become as a sexual man, and that vision reflects the full nature and blessings of male sexuality, we will have a powerful and lasting motivation to continue the journey, to reach that place.

MAKE IT YOUR VISION

I have written my own vision, and I have revised it a number of times. But I am not going to share it with you, because I believe to do so would hinder more than help you. I have had years to think about my vision. I have worked for years in helping Christian men overcome sexual sin problems. In other words, I would be viewed as an “expert”,

and as such my vision would easily be transferred into becoming a picture of who you *ought* to be. And this would bring you right back under the law.

But let me offer a few suggestions to guide you in your first writing of the vision. Note that I say “first” writing. You don’t have to get it perfect. It should be written to be revised. As you grow in your understanding of sexuality—and of yourself—you will want to revise it. Some of this will come as you learn more from reading this book; more will come later as the man you are changes, as you move towards the vision.

First, don’t put a timetable on the vision. My experience has been that God usually works more slowly than I think He should—but then of course, as regards timing (and everything else) He is always right.

Let the vision be an ideal. Don’t hold back because of perceived limitations in yourself or in what you believe God is willing to do. *We can* do all things in Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13). God so often wants more for us than we are willing to even ask for.

Let the vision be broad, not just describing how you have sexual intercourse with your wife or how you stay chaste as a single man. Your sexuality is a much broader thing. It has to do with your manhood, how you view your own body, how you relate to men and women more generally, how you respond to beauty, your capacity to love, and many other elements in life that are sexual but not specifically genital.

If you are single, unless you are quite certain you are called to a ministry in which it is better to remain single, write your vision first of all for yourself as a married man. That is God’s norm. But obviously, finding a wife is not entirely under your control, so have a secondary vision: “But if God does not provide me a wife....”

Also, if you live with other factors in your life that are not totally under your control to change, prepare “but if....” alternatives also. If you deal with homosexuality and can’t be sure how far God will take you in change, or if you deal with impotence and don’t know what healing will be experienced, write a vision first for yourself as a healed man, and then as a man who has not been healed.

The same would apply for married men whose wives, because of past wounding or unresolved sins in their own lives, have significant sexual problems that impact on your marital relationship, write first as if your wife had changed, and then write a “but if she never changes” option.

For those men who face the types of problems I’ve just described, the prayerful writing of an alternative vision could be a powerful spiritual experience in your life, one in which God uncovers some of the hurts and hopes that have been dwelling unseen in your heart. I will touch on this later on.

WRITE THE VISION NOW!

Very
Good
Hope
Expand
on this
elsewhere

Except for those who are studying this book in a group or who are individually going through the book faithfully answering the questions at the end of each chapter, *God's Sexual Man: The Vision and the Realization* is not a workbook. However, as strongly as I can, I plead with you to do the one exercise called for here: **Write out your vision for who you are to become as a sexual man. Do it now.** Put it off, and you probably won't do it. Do it now, and the hours you spend reading the book will ultimately prove to be far more fruitful. Write it now, and this will not be just another nice helpful Christian book you read; it can be a life changing experience.

Write it now, and your mind and heart will become directed towards a clear goal, not aimed at a moving target. Write it now, and see the Holy Spirit take it and refine and revise it to make it truly reflect how God sees you today—a redeemed sexual man.

No matter how simple and brief it starts out, God will work with you over time to broaden and deepen it. And He will give you hope for its fulfillment and excitement about the journey.

As Christian men who are on a journey, we will almost inevitably be looking at the road ahead, and at the end of that road we can see the Father with arms outstretched ready to welcome and embrace us. Indeed, all of us are prodigal sons on the way to the place of our Father. This is reality. This is truth. This is hope

Let us each declare like Paul; *...forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ* (Philippians 3:13-14).