Series: Vision

January 7, 2018

Message One:

**How Do We See?**

Nehemiah 1:1-4

Growth Track Step 1

Generosity

Prayer

**Intro:**God has blessed this church family.

In this past year God has continued to clarify our vision that He wants us to be a church that helps people Know God, Find Freedom, Discover Purpose and Make a Difference.

We are seeing more people come to know Jesus …

We are seeing more people become free from the hurts of the past … Small Groups …

We are seeing more people Discovering their Purpose … Growth Track stats… If that many people are doing it - you should check it out! Start today!

We are seeing more people Make a Difference in other people’s lives.

We are seeing leadership change …

All this happens because God gives vision and direction.

How does this happen?

Sometimes we see spiritual leaders who are so sure of themselves - so sure of the direction of God for their lives - and we may wonder, “How can I have that certain of direction and purpose for my life? For my family? How can I know what God wants me to do? What direction He wants me to go?”

How can I see? How do we see?

Nehemiah … Israel had been in slavery in Babylon for 70 years … people started to go back … the place was a mess …

Nehemiah heard about it and was very sad - He worked for the king …

Nehemiah 1:1-4 - These are the memoirs of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah.

 In late autumn, in the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes’ reign, I was at the fortress of Susa. Hanani, one of my brothers, came to visit me with some other men who had just arrived from Judah. I asked them about the Jews who had returned there from captivity and about how things were going in Jerusalem. They said to me, “Things are not going well for those who returned to the province of Judah. They are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem has been torn down, and the gates have been destroyed by fire.”

 When I heard this, I sat down and wept. In fact, for days I mourned, fasted, and prayed to the God of heaven.

Fasting simply means - to abstain from food -

If you are going to have certain medical procedures done - you have to fast … Don’t like it - don’t want to - but you have to -

They are not talking about refraining from tv, facebook, movies, partial fasts - you are supposed to fast!

Nehemiah fasted here for days!

Why? He needed direction? What am I going to do about the situation in Jerusalem? What can I do? How can I help?

He needed direction! He needed vision!

This is our question - how do I see? How do I answer the big questions for my life?

In the Bible - over and over again - in fact - there are 35 different instances where people fasted - for direction - for spiritual power!

When we fast, we are destroying our natural desires, so that spiritual desires can become stronger! We are removing our vision from the things of this world, so that we can see what God wants us to see - clearly!

Matthew 6:16 - And when you fast…

It is simply expected that followers of Jesus will set aside periods for fasting and prayer to seek God’s power and purpose for their lives.

There are no specific regulations or set rules for how long or how often -

Various practices -

* a meal a week
* A day a week
* Daniel’s 21 days …
* Different options for these 21 days …

If you have medical conditions that preclude a total fast - don’t worry about that - no legalism or condemnation - do what you are able to do and God will honor that!

Fasting is necessary to receive the totality of God’s purpose for our lives!

**> Fasting is a personal discipline.**

Matthew 6:16-18 - And when you fast, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

We’re doing this together - but we’re not doing it for show.

We’re doing this to receive the vision of God - not to show one another how spiritual we are.

Someone said, “Although the disciples are to be seen doing good works, they must not do good works in order to be seen.”

When the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day would fast, they were always trying to make sure people noticed - They purposefully made themselves look worse so people would notice they were fasting.

Jesus says, “Keep yourself clean, go about your business - you are only doing this for a greater connection with God.”

Keep this in mind - If you are only skipping meals, you will only get hungry! Fasting must be coupled with times of worship and prayer … That is when we put ourselves in a position to hear from God.

It has come so clear for me …

Whenever you fast - whatever you fast from - whatever time you spend fasting - use that time for worship, prayer and listening.

**> Fasting leads to hearing from God.**

Exodus 34:28 - Moses remained there on the mountain with the Lord forty days and forty nights. In all that time he ate no bread and drank no water. And the Lord wrote the terms of the covenant—the Ten Commandments—on the stone tablets.

We are not recommending 40 days with no water - that was supernatural.

The point here is that Moses’ fasting led him to receive the plan of God for His people! That is what we want! We want to know what God’s plan is for us -

* personally
* As families
* As a church

As a result of fasting and prayer, Moses was taught how God wanted His people to live and thrive and worship in difficult circumstances - sounds pretty good for us!

Daniel 10:1-14 - In the third year of the reign of King Cyrus of Persia, Daniel (also known as Belteshazzar) had another **vision**. He understood that the **vision** concerned events certain to happen in the future…

 When this **vision** came to me, I, Daniel, had been in mourning for three whole weeks. All that time I had eaten no rich food. No meat or wine crossed my lips, … On April 23, as I was standing on the bank of the great Tigris River, I looked up and saw a man dressed in linen clothing, with a belt of pure gold around his waist. His body looked like a precious gem. His face flashed like lightning, and his eyes flamed like torches. His arms and feet shone like polished bronze, and his voice roared like a vast multitude of people.

 Only I, Daniel, saw this **vision**. The men with me saw nothing, but they were suddenly terrified and ran away to hide. So I was left there all alone to see this amazing **vision**. My strength left me, my face grew deathly pale, and I felt very weak. Then I heard the man speak, and when I heard the sound of his voice, I fainted and lay there with my face to the ground.

 Just then a hand touched me and lifted me, still trembling, to my hands and knees. And the man said to me, “Daniel, you are very precious to God, so listen carefully to what I have to say to you. Stand up, for I have been sent to you.” When he said this to me, I stood up, still trembling.

 Then he said, “Don’t be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day you began to pray for understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your request has been heard in heaven. I have come in answer to your prayer...

 Now I am here to explain what will happen to your people in the future, for this **vision** concerns a time yet to come.”

God has a plan for us! God has a vision for us!

God has a plan for you! God has a vision for you!

He will reveal that to us in fasting and prayer - and He will let us know that we are very precious to God!

Why does God require this? I don’t have all the answers - but I know when we make sacrifices, God honors and answers. When we display that we are willing to give up what we want, God gives us what He wants!

He even changes our desires -

Psalm 37:4 - Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart’s desires.

Meaning …

**> Fasting reveals God’s direction.**

Acts 13:1-3 NIV - Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were **worshiping the Lord and fasting**, **the Holy Spirit said**, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had **fasted and prayed**, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

This is how the first followers of Christ received direction for church leadership - there was no voting - there were no elections!

Acts 14:23 - Paul and Barnabas also appointed elders in every church. With **prayer and fasting**, they turned the elders over to the care of the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

They fasted and prayed in order to hear from God for leadership!

The same will work in our lives -

Should you get a new job?

What vocation has God called you to?

Which college should I attend?

Should I start that Master’s program?

Should I marry this person?

For some of these questions, God will say, “I’m leaving the decision up to you!”

For some decisions, we need to know we are hearing from Him to have His direction for our lives - so that we can fulfill His ultimate purpose for our lives!

Acts 10 - Cornelius …

Acts 10:3 - One afternoon about three o’clock, he had a **vision**…

The vision and message …

Acts 10:9-11 - The next day as Cornelius’s messengers were nearing the town, Peter went up on the flat roof to pray. It was about noon, and he was hungry. But while a meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the sky open…

It doesn’t look like Peter intended to fast - but he got so wrapped up in prayer, and God showing him things, that he ended up skipping the meal -

Went to Cornelius’ house - the first group of Gentiles to receive the message …

God will do stuff if we fast and pray!

God will save people!

People will come to Know God - Find Freedom - Discover their Purpose - Make a Difference - if we fast and pray!

**> Fasting bring power.**

Matthew 17:14-21 - When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him." And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me." And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once.

 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. [But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”]

There are some answers - this is the only way you are going to get them.

There are some spiritual advancements - this is the only way you are going to get them.

There are some hurdles and obstacles in our lives - this is the only way we are going to get past them.

So - I’m going to pray - and I’m going to fast - and as a spiritual leader ordained by God to lead - I’m going to challenge you to do the same -

* For the sake of your own spiritual progress
* For the sake of your family
* For the sake of your ministry
* For the sake of this church
* For the sake of your spiritual leaders

So many other stories -

Book of Esther - a plan to eradicate the Jews - thwarted by fasting and prayer.

Daniel - the Lions Den - the king fasted all night long!

Matthew 4 - Jesus fasted to begin His ministry and overcome temptation.

* We need to see God’s vision.
* We need this discipline.
* We need to hear from God.
* We need God’s direction.
* We need spiritual power.

Join me …