

Cast Vision and Share Hope

1 Peter 3:15

Thesis: I believe that we need to be ready to cast vision and to share the reason we have hope. We need to be prepared to share what we think, feel, and believe when people ask us why we are doing what we are doing. Our sharing must be done with gentleness and respect; we don't want to imply that we are clever or superior because we have figured out some things.

Text: 1 Peter 3:15-16

15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander (1 Peter 3:15-16 NIV).

I believe that we need to be ready to cast vision and to share the reason we have hope. We need to be prepared to share what we think, feel, and believe when people ask us why we are doing what we are doing. Our sharing must be done with gentleness and respect; we don't want to imply that we are clever or superior because we have figured out some things.

Some of us have been following Christ for so long that we have forgotten what the Lord has done for us, in us, and through us. We take for granted how much the Lord has changed our values, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. He has changed our lives. He has changed our core vision and understanding of how life works. He has changed our motives. He has given us purpose and calling. All of this change has become naturalized in us.

Along the way, we forget why we are doing what we are doing. We are doing what we are doing in response to the call, leadership, and invitation of the Lord. It is possible to do what we do without remembering and articulating "the why."

I have recently become aware of that reality of forgetting "the why" I am involved in certain practices and ministries.

The need to remember and articulate "the why"

Let me give you an illustration.

Recently, I have been in conversations with people about corporate prayer at Calvary. I have been asked, "Why do you participate in the Prayer Room at Calvary?" "What is

your vision for the Prayer Room?" I have been involved for so long in the prayer room, that I just say to people, who ask why I pray, "I am called to pray" or "we are called to pray."

But, why do I pray? Why do I participate in several corporate prayer meetings each week?

I took time to get with the Lord and to ask him those questions. Here is what came out of my time of solitude, prayer, and dialogue with others.

I believe the Lord has called me to prayer through his Word and his Spirit.

1. I participate in corporate prayer because Jesus said his house (corporately and individually) would be a house of prayer for all nations (Mark 11:17).
2. I participate in corporate prayer because Jesus is looking for faith that prays and doesn't give up (Luke 18:1-8). When the Son of Man returns, will he find holy, believing, persevering prayer?
3. I participate in corporate prayer because I want to partner with Jesus who ever lives to intercede (Hebrews 7:25).

Now, when people ask me why I pray and why I am involved in corporate prayer, this is what I am sharing.

I believe that we need to cast vision and share hope with gentleness and respect.

Those who tell the story control the narrative.

We need to take time to reflect with the Lord and to remember our "whys," so that we can share the reason for the hope that is within us.

Cast vision and share hope

Vision Casting is a hopeful description or word picture about a future to which God is calling you. (Where is God leading you? What is God calling you to be or do? What hope is God giving birth to in your life? What dream is being called out of you?)

Describing **Current Reality** shares how your story connects with God's calling in the present moment. (What has happened recently where you have attempted to live into God's calling and your dreams? Tell that story clearly, authentically, and passionately.)

Transformation Conversations express where you are (a current reality story) and where you sense God is leading you (vision casting).

Here is another example about the need to cast vision and share hope.

People ask, “Why are we involved with Hairgrove Elementary and why are we helping to encourage other churches to partner with local schools?”

Yes, we love children. And, yes, we love to help people. But why?

Yes, we want to help change the trajectory of children for good and we want to work for good in our communities. But why?

Here is the answer that gets to the heart of the matter: We do what we do because Jesus loves us, is changing us, and has asked us to partner with him in loving and serving others.

I want our volunteers at Hairgrove to know why we they serve in various ways to bless Hairgrove Elementary. Just telling people, “I like to serve” or “I like helping children” fails to cast vision, to share hope, or to get down to the real reason or motivation.

Here is a response that sets apart Christ as Lord, casts vision, and gives an answer for the hope we have, in gentleness and respect.

I am here to serve because Jesus loves you, and he has put his love in me. I love helping children, parents, and staff because Jesus loves in and through me.

That is the real reason we here; it’s not just because we like children or that we like helping or that we want to serve.

Now, here is the big vision for our partnership with Hairgrove Elementary and Copperfield Church.

Our Hairgrove Elementary partnership is a response to the Whole and Healthy Children Initiative across Greater Houston. This effort started back around 2005. Pastor Dave Peters of Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church felt like the Lord asked him a question: “What if Houston were as famous for whole and healthy children as it is for NASA?” He was clear, authentic, and passionate when he shared that vision from the Lord with leaders from across Houston. Some of the key leaders in Houston determined that changing the trajectory of children was a high leverage activity for the transformation of Houston.

Copperfield Church began serving at Hairgrove in 2008. Calvary joined the partnership in 2009. (We had been serving at another school since 2006.) Energy Capital Credit Union has been partnering with Hairgrove for years, too.

Caring adults can make a difference in the lives of staff and students in the public arena through mentoring, volunteering, praying, and giving. We long to see transformation in our community. Changing the lives of children, equipping mentors to become change-

agents, and doing acts of Christ-centered goodness (Acts 10:38) will help us toward our goal of personal and community transformation.

This vision of our partnership is to demonstrate the love of Jesus to students, staff, and families of Hairgrove Elementary through service, support, encouragement, and prayer in order to restore our community to God's design and to impact the lives of children positively for the future.

Changing the trajectory of children is a high leverage activity for Greater Houston: (1) to overcome poverty through education, (2) to keep kids in school (vs. dropping out), (3) raise up future leaders, and (4) raise up employable adults for businesses in Greater Houston and beyond.

The impact of caring adults in the lives of children is amazing. Children are making the decision in the second grade to stay in or drop out of school.

Having regular Transformation Conversations helps us to cast vision and share hope

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15).

We are called to walk in the light (1 John 1:7-9). Having Transformation Conversations on a regular basis is a way to walk in the light intentionally. A Transformation Conversation has two parts:

- (1) **Vision Casting** is a hopeful description or word picture about a future to which God is calling you. (Where is God leading you? What is God calling you to be or do? What hope is God giving birth to in your life? What dream is being called out of you?)
- (2) **Current Reality** describes how your story connects with God's calling in the present moment. (What has happened recently where you have attempted to live into God's calling and your dreams? Tell that story clearly, authentically, and passionately.)

Transformation Conversations express where you are (a current reality story) and where you sense God is leading you (vision casting).

Throughout, the Bible paints a picture of the "now" and "not yet," inviting us to the experience of progressively living in to "perfect peace" (Isaiah 26:3), "abundant life" (John 10:10), "incredible and glorious joy" (1 Peter 1:18), and being "filled to the

measure of all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19). This is not dreamy, wishful thinking, but is “vision casting” and the very “hope to which he has called you” (Ephesians 1:18a).

Vision casting is using your words to describe the future to which God is calling you.

It is my deep conviction that for transformation to happen, you must live a reflective life that combines times of (1) solitude, (2) prayer, and (3) dialogue in community with other trusted friends. These practices will help you learn the way of Jesus by imitating the life and teaching of Jesus through regular practice. These practices will lead to a clear conviction about what God is calling you to be and to do.

Note that the practices of the Reflective Life (engaging in spiritual practices that help one experience intimacy with God) lead to the vision. You do not manufacture vision out of thin air. As you practice loving God and loving others, God’s Spirit will provide guidance to you. If you do vision casting apart from the Reflective Life, you will be tempted to pursue a vision that...

- you can achieve in your own strength,
- you make up in order to keep looking good, or
- you can achieve without facing your deepest fears or desires

I believe that individuals who are deeply connected to God should have daily conversations that regularly express the hope of the future to which God is calling them. The vision casting aspect of Transformation Conversations is a way to do this. For when you practice the competency of vision casting, you are developing the discipline of giving voice to the hope you find in your relationship with God and God’s mission in the world.

Sharing Current Reality

The second part of the conversation involves sharing stories and experiences that you are currently having that are moving you toward the future God is calling you to engage. In addition to sharing a hopeful vision of the future, you want to describe what is currently happening in relation to that vision.

What you choose to share regarding your current reality may fall into one of four main categories:

- (1) **Celebrate growth** — No matter where you are on your journey, you have something to celebrate. The fact that you are having a Transformation Conversation at all probably represents some amount of progress in your

life. Where have you grown in awareness? In what ways has God changed your desires? Where do you feel hopeful instead of resigned and cynical? Where have you experienced breakthrough?

- (2) **Describe the gap** — Think about the vision God has given you of the future—it might relate to how you “show up” in the world in key relationships or what God wants to do through you in your work. Now take an honest look at where you are in relation to that vision. This is perhaps the most difficult part of the Transformation Conversation and probably the most important. There is something strangely powerful about simply saying “what is so” for us. It is in our experience of vulnerability with God and others that we find true healing. When we can look at these broken places in our lives that keep us stuck or stopped and do this without shame, we will begin to experience the transformation that comes from daily living in God’s love and acceptance.

So take a moment to reflect. What is the “integrity gap” that stands between you and the hopeful vision God is calling you to? What in you still needs to be transformed? Where are you still getting stuck?

- (3) **Share action steps** — What steps are you currently taking in response to what God is showing you? Maybe you are engaging a new discipline or maybe you have asked for accountability around a particular change you want to make. Maybe you plan to have a crucial conversation with an important person in your life. Maybe you are still trying to figure out what action steps look like for you right now (by spending time in solitude, having Transformation Conversations regularly, receiving coaching, etc.). Wherever you are in this process, speaking out your current steps will provide you with greater accountability and may even encourage others to think about where they want to get into action.
- (4) **Give your word** — It’s possible that in the process of having a Transformation Conversation you may feel led to give your word to something. It may be something small, like committing to asking for coaching/accountability. Or it may be something much bigger! If you have a clear vision of an area of personal transformation or mission, you may want to speak that out—even if what you are giving your word to is far beyond what you can keep given your current capacity. Remember, when we join our word with God’s word, we are trusting that God is faithful to bring to completion the things God starts.

To clarify, you will probably not share something from every one of these four categories every time you have a Transformation Conversation. The one category that should always be present is to “describe the gap” (because if there weren’t a gap, you wouldn’t be seeking transformation). The other three categories may or may not come up, depending on how you feel led to share in any given conversation.

Your current reality is a clear and authentic description of where you are now in relationship to where you believe God is leading you.

Characteristics of Transformation Conversations

Effective Transformation Conversations have two parts— (1) a picture or image or vision of a hopeful future and (2) a story of what’s currently happening as you move toward that future. Both parts should be as clear, authentic, and passionate as possible. You will find that the more you actually have Transformation Conversations, the more these qualities will grow.

Clarity — When you can describe the future in a way that makes sense to other people and allows them to “see” the possibilities, you are being clear. Clarity extends an invitation and calls for action. It says, “This is where I’m headed, do you want to come with me?” As you have Transformation Conversations that include a clear vision of the future you are moving towards, some people will be inspired and drawn in. Others will become stirred up and anxious. In both cases, your clarity provides an opening for the Holy Spirit to work in someone’s life.

What stops you from being clear? You may feel that you must have perfect clarity before engaging in a Transformation Conversation. With this mindset, you will be stuck for a long time! However, sharing what you currently see, with as much clarity as you can, will actually increase your clarity. As you share, others will ask questions or make suggestions. The questions will help you clarify your thinking and your communication.

Authenticity — You live in a world where you are “taught” to wear masks. You learn to put on display a certain way of being in order to be right or at least avoid being wrong, to win or at least avoid losing, to look good or at least avoid looking bad. So you put on and take off masks that allow you to pretend to be what you think you need to be in order to achieve these things. Over time, this way of being becomes increasingly unconscious, or second nature.

You are authentic, on the other hand, when you put on display what is true about you, including your struggles to be real, the places where you have been out of integrity, and the places where you experience doubt or have become resigned and cynical.

Authenticity touches people. It makes you vulnerable, true. But it also makes you real and approachable. People are drawn to these attributes. It seems out of the ordinary. As you tell your story, be honest about the places you are making progress and the places where you are still struggling. Sometimes this work is hard and you want to quit. Sometimes you are resigned and cynical about getting a breakthrough. In reporting progress, don't hide the hard stuff. Be authentic. What stops you from being authentic—especially about your areas of habitual relationship patterns that undermine or destroy connection and intimacy?

Passion — We are by nature passionate people. It's born into the very fabric of our being. Watch little children as they play and interact in life. They express their experience naturally without censoring themselves. It's only as we grow older that we learn to mask our experience. We learn to pretend we don't care as much, to be "cool," and to dial back our enthusiasm.

Sometimes we even lose the experience of passion when we get so involved in the demands of daily life that we shut down our emotions and just focus on getting through the day. Passion will look different on different people, but generally when we express passion, our voices become more intense and our demeanor is more energetic. We lean into the conversation physically, and we are animated as we talk. Passion doesn't mean that we talk loudly or use more words. It does mean that we express our convictions with feeling. Passion is life giving, and people are drawn to it. What stops you from being passionate?

Back to 1 Peter 3:8-22

8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. 9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. 10 For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. 11 He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. 12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil" (1 Peter 3:8-10).

Here Peter is giving very practical instructions on how to show up in this world.

Are these instructions really necessary?

Yes, these instructions and values need to be stressed because Christians are learning to navigate in the dangerous new world in which they find themselves. **This was so in the first century, and it's increasingly so in the twenty-first.** In what used to be thought of as

the “Christian West,” particularly Europe and North America, it used to be taken for granted that we lived in a “Christian” country. In fact, unless people were some other religion, it was assumed that everyone was, more or less, “Christian.” Now all that has been swept away, and anyone who really is “Christian” may well stand out. In some quarters—politics, art, the media and particularly journalism—anyone known as a Christian may well attract scorn, criticism, or even discrimination. In other words, Christians in the Western world are in a process of rejoining the mainstream. This is what it was like from the beginning. This is what it's like for probably a majority of Christians in the world today.

But it's not easy for Western Christians, faced with this shift, to unlearn old habits and to learn the necessary new ones. We are not as used, as many Christians have had to be, to treading the fine line between sinking without trace into the surrounding culture, on the one hand, and adopting a stand-offish, holier-than-thou approach on the other.

How does a Christian act when surrounded by a world that doesn't understand what we think we're about, and is potentially hostile toward what we think?

1. Live in harmony with one another;
2. Be sympathetic,
3. Love as brothers,
4. Be compassionate
5. Be humble (1 Peter 3:8).
6. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing (1 Peter 3:9).
7. Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceitful speech (1 Peter 3:10).
8. Turn from evil and do good;
9. Seek peace [wholeness and well-being] and pursue it (1 Peter 3:11).

Why should we live like this in contrast to the world?

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil (1 Peter 3:12).

You have to learn to live differently as stated in these verses because it will be all too easy to lapse into the way people in our culture behave.

Here is the irony: Christians are supposed to stand out as distinctive, but when we do, we are often mocked or criticized for it. Then, we are tempted to mock and criticize right back—at which point we are no longer distinctive, because we are behaving just like everyone else.

And that, my friends, describes our current political climate. The other side has treated us with contempt and disdain; many Christians have gotten tired of being pushed around and slandered. So, some Christians fight back and treat others the way that they are being treated. We are losing our Christian witness as we promote political party allegiance above conformity to the Lord and his character and his testimony.

The weapons we fight with are not carnal, they are divinely powerful (2 Corinthians 10:3-6). But if we get down to the level of the world and fight like the world does, we soil our testimony and we lose the battle, because we can't win if we fight the enemy on his turf with his weapons.

13 Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened" (1 Peter 3:13-14).

Peter is writing to Christians already suffering for their faith; therefore, he is not saying that such suffering is improbable. His point is that no one will ultimately or finally harm Christians, "even if" they suffer now, for God will reward them (Romans 8:31). Indeed, they will be blessed by God in their sufferings (Matthew 5:10).

15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15).

1. We get our "why" in a living, intimate relationship with Christ our Lord.
2. We need to be ready to cast vision and to share the hope we have in Christ.
3. And we cast vision and share hope with gentleness and respect.

16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil (1 Peter 3:16-17).

In this broken culture we want to hold on to a good conscience. This is vital. Day by day, hour by hour, we need to keep a watch over our inner moral monitoring system. Don't let it get rusty. Don't start ignoring it or telling it to be quiet. And this is not for your own sake merely (though you are yourself at risk if you try to silence your conscience). It is outward-looking. A good Christian conscience means being a good witness in a puzzled and suspicious world. It may take time to have its effect, but that's a lot better than a

single moment of stupidity which gives the watching world the perfect excuse to ignore the gospel ever afterward.

Believers should always be ready to provide a rationale for their faith, but they should do so winsomely and righteously. And if they keep a good conscience, any accusations against them will prove groundless, and their accusers will be put to shame.

It is reality that Christians will suffer for doing good. Surely that is better than suffering because we have failed to do good and have chosen sin instead.

18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, 19 through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison 20 who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, 21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand--with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him (1 Peter 3:18-22).

In this passage, Peter tells us 4 things. First, after his death Jesus made a “proclamation” to “the spirits in prison.” Second, these spirits had been disobedient in the days of Noah. Third, Noah's building of an ark to rescue his family points forward to baptism. Fourth, baptism is less about washing clean and more about “the appeal to God of a good conscience.”

How do these statements fit into this passage?

We should remind ourselves of what the passage is basically all about. It is an encouragement to people who are likely to suffer unjust treatment from the human authorities—not just, in other words, from a random act of mob violence or casual brutality, but an official, legal, persecution. And the point that Peter is making is not only that this brings them into line with the Messiah himself, who suffered in the same way. The point is that after his suffering he announced God's victory over all “authorities,” particularly the ones in the heavenly places. In other words, the point of these four elements, which may seem strange to us, is to add further dimensions to what he's already said about the new authorities.

The human authorities embody “spiritual” authorities which stand behind them in the shadowy, unseen realm. And Peter's point is that these complex authorities have received notice that Jesus has overthrown their power. He is now sovereign over the whole world, all other authorities included. That is why the passage ends with the

emphatic claim that Jesus, through his ascension into heaven, now has “angels, authorities, and powers subject to him” (1 Peter 3:22).

So how do these four apparently peculiar elements add up to this conclusion? Here, we need understanding of the current context of Peter’s day. One of the better-known books in first-century Judaism, much treasured by many who were hoping for God to do some great act of liberation, was the one we know as 1 Enoch. It wasn’t actually written by the Enoch we find in Genesis 5:18-24, but it was written to look as though it was. This book traces the woes and problems of the world right back, in particular, to the wicked angels or heavenly council (sons of God) of Genesis 6, spiritual beings who, in the time of Noah, rebelled against God their creator. The book 1 Enoch celebrates the victory that God has won, or will win, over these spiritual beings. What Peter is saying here is that the victory over these dark forces of evil has in fact been won—through the Messiah; and that, after his resurrection (after he had been “made alive by the spirit,” as in verse 18), he, the Messiah, made this definitive announcement to the “spirits”: they had indeed been judged. Their power, such as it was, had been broken. This ought then to function as a considerable encouragement to the little groups of Christians who face persecution from their own local authorities, and from the shadowy spiritual “forces” that seemed to give them their power. Ever since their original rebellion these “forces” had been wielding usurped power. Now the Messiah has triumphed over them, and deep down they know it.

Noah’s ark, then, comes into the frame. There was a widespread belief among not only Jews but also pagans in ancient Turkey that Noah and his ark had come to rest on a mountain in their region. Peter is appealing to a story that was well known in the wider culture. Since that story involved people being rescued through the great flood, it is a fairly obvious picture of baptism, which in Romans 6 is seen as the means of dying and rising with the Messiah.

Consider this comparison that is drawn between salvation in the ark and baptism. In both instances, believers are saved through the waters of judgment, since baptism portrays salvation through judgment. The mere mechanical act of baptism does not save, for Peter explicitly says, “not as a removal of dirt from the body,” meaning that the passing of water over the body does not cleanse anyone. Baptism saves you because it represents inward faith, as evidenced by one’s appeal to God for the forgiveness of one’s sins (for a good conscience). Furthermore, baptism “saves” only insofar as it is grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism is a visual representation of the fact that Christians are clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:27), and in union with Christ they share his victory over sin. Though Christians have disagreed about the proper mode of water baptism beginning in the early history of the church, Christians have generally agreed that water baptism is an outward sign of the inward reality of regeneration, which is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5, 8; Titus 3:5), and which may be received only by grace through faith (see Ephesians 2:8).

Baptism is a public confession which marks out the Christian publicly from the world around. Precisely because it functions as the boundary marker for the Christian community, it shapes the confrontation that must then take place between that community and the watching world. As Peter has already said in verse 16, this means that baptism provides the ground (through the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus' death) for that "good conscience" which means that when the confrontation happens the Christian need not be ashamed.

The passage then really does fit together. These pieces, strange to us at first sight, really do belong where they are, and they mean what the opening and closing verses say they mean. What we need to know, when facing trouble or persecution, is this. Jesus the Messiah has fulfilled the hope of Israel by defeating all the spiritual powers in the world, the ones who were responsible for wickedness and corruption from ancient times. It may not look like it to the little Christian communities facing the possibility of suffering, but their baptism places them alongside the Messiah in his victory. They must hold their heads up, keep their consciences clear, and trust that his victory will be played out in the world to which they are bearing witness. There are many Christians today who need precisely this message. We need the message of this passage to motivate and inform our prayers for our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted. And, we will need the message of this passage in the day when we personally experience persecution.

Conclusion:

I believe that we need to be ready to cast vision and to share the reason we have hope. We need to be prepared to share what we think, feel, and believe when people ask us why we are doing what we are doing. Our sharing must be done with gentleness and respect.