

## 9 Visionary Leadership

### AIM

To show that vision is not only about the future but is about reaching into a community's past, recalling its values and from there leading into the future.

### INTRODUCTION

In order to help the group to think about the different areas in which members might have found themselves giving visionary leadership over the years, prepare two interviews with people who are willing to share their experiences. (briefly!) These may have individual, family, professional and work related, community or a church related basis and include:

- Personal development
- Starting out
- Handling a difficult situation
- Leadership towards a special goal
- Building relationships
- Some area of church leadership

Do other members of the group identify with this and are there other experiences that could be shared? Using a flipchart, record the comments of the group then reflect on the following questions:

- Were you well prepared to give leadership?
- Where did you draw your resources from?
- Had you a vision as to the direction your leadership should take?
- Had you a model or framework to work within?

### Background

Most of us can find ourselves in leadership situations that we are totally unprepared for, yet we get on with it and produce results!

Every organisational unit, including the Church, requires visionary leadership as a life-giving oxygen. In the case of the local church this leadership is doubly important if we take seriously our calling; i.e. the church has been called to give spiritual leadership to save a needy world.

Each congregation has a leadership team in an organisation that has been called to give leadership. Many give leadership in working groups or by having an influence in worship and witness.

A question with which all organisations struggle is –

'Are leaders born to be leaders or can people be trained to be leaders?'

The jury may still be out on the debate as to whether they are 'born', or can be trained and developed into the role; but irrespective of their origin, we have both Biblical and historical pictures of the framework of qualities that go with visionary leadership.

One framework model that is used in business circles is the model of the '360 Degree leader'. Bill Hybels in his book *Courageous Leadership* picks up this theme of the framework of 'The 360-Degree leader'.

*'Almost every time the word leadership is mentioned, in what direction do leaders instinctively think?*

*South.*

*Say the word leadership and most leaders' minds migrate to the people under their care. When they go to leadership conferences they assume they have only one goal: to improve their ability to lead the people God has entrusted to them.*

*South. It's a leader's first instinct.*

*What many people don't realise is that to lead well, a leader actually needs to lead in all directions – north, south, east and west.'* (*Courageous Leadership* – page 181 – Zondervan)

Hybels goes on to explain how 360degree, gives leadership in all four directions; -

North by influencing those who are over them

South by leading those who are under their care

East and West by impacting their peers.

Finally, and most importantly they keep the compass needle centred by leading themselves. All very elementary, but it is still worth pointing out that if the centre of the compass is not correctly positioned then the directional guidance will be suspect! (See Study on Integrity)

The Bible is full of stories about such leaders, Nehemiah being only one.

### **Biblical Material – Nehemiah - Chapters 1 & 2**

By the year 581BC both of the divided kingdoms of Israel had fallen into exile away from the Promised Land. Although born during the period of this exile, Nehemiah had a clear understanding of the children of Israel's place in the plan of God and was determined to bring his visionary leadership to enable God's plan to be fulfilled.

Despite being a member of a minority group Nehemiah had reached the honoured position of cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. Such a position would only have been given to someone who was completely trusted in the King's court and it brought with it great privilege and security. Despite this security Nehemiah made it his business to enquire about the circumstances in his homeland. When he heard about the plight of the people, and the walls of Jerusalem still in a state of disrepair Nehemiah sat down and wept. But he did not despair. Nehemiah prayed about the situation. He planned and then got the King's support in letters for him to return to Jerusalem with help, to undertake the task that God had called him to.

Just over ninety years earlier the first group of exiles had returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel around 536BC (See Book of Haggai). In spite of opposition, they succeeded in having the Temple rebuilt. A second group followed under Ezra around 458BC and so Nehemiah's group was the third group to make the journey in about 445BC.

It was the reports of these earlier groups that had disturbed Nehemiah so much. In particular, although they had managed to rebuild a small Temple, the walls of Jerusalem had not been reconstructed, leaving the city open to attack. In effect the people of God had left themselves exposed both physically and spiritually to attack and didn't seem to care about the situation. In the face of strong local opposition, Nehemiah, steeped in the history of God's people and with a vision for their future destiny, challenged, motivated and organised the returned exiles to rebuild the city walls and also to renew their faith in the purposes to which God had called them.

Find the references in Nehemiah 1 & 2 that hold the following key points in Nehemiah's success? (you will find it useful to glance through chapters 3 &4!) [F/C the answers](#)

- He held both a sense of history and destiny of the people of God  
.....
- He cared enough to ask the King for his support  
.....
- He was prepared to move outside his comfort zone  
.....
- He was a man of prayer – with legs  
.....
- He vision embraced the need all around him  
.....
- He was prepared to deal with the local leaders Sanballet, Tobiah and Geshem, who opposed the work  
.....
- He assessed the work, planned his approach and organised the operation section at a time  
.....

What particular things strike you about any of these answers?  
.....  
.....

**Discussion** [Take some time in groups and then share the answers on F/C](#)  
Nehemiah exercised 'Three hundred and sixty degree leadership'.

- What do you consider were his North, South, East and West compass points?  
.....
- How did he keep the centre of his compass positioned?  
.....

In terms of our Church Leadership is the three hundred and sixty degree model relevant?  
• If it is, what are our North, South, East and West points and how do we keep on course?  
.....  
.....

- What lessons can we learn from Nehemiah about keeping our compass centred when it comes to Church leadership?
- .....

**Closing**

Pray for those whom you influence: ask for close collegueship amongst the leaders in your Church; pray for the building of the "city walls" - that is the safety and good order of the community in which you live and work, asking that your Church would find ways of working with others for the common good.

**Songs – suggestions**

Be Thou my Vision  
Jesus, be the centre  
I'm giving you my heart