How to build a Gospel Advancing Ministry!

A Bold Vision Focuses It

There’s something about a bold vision that focuses us.

Yesterday I did a staff training for a national ministry. I trained them in the 7 values of a Gospel Advancing ministry. When I got to the 5th value I asked a simple question, “What is your bold vision as a ministry?” There was silence. Finally someone spoke up and shared something, then another. But one was a verse from Scripture and the other was a goal for an event. Nobody, not even the President of the organization of this nationally known ministry could articulate it.

The good news is that they recognized the need and are going to take action to identify and develop it.

Why? Because a bold vision helps us focus all of our efforts! It enables us to

Value #5: A Bold Vision Focuses It!

Perhaps no bigger bolder vision was ever given than by Jesus, right before he ascended into heaven 40 days after his resurrection. Here are the last words of Jesus before he arose…

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

I’m going to give you my big idea based on Acts 1:8 right up front. Here it is: A bold vision to reach the lost starts in our hearts spreads to the streets and ends up at the ends of the earth.

Here Jesus makes it clear that when the Holy Spirit came to dwell inside of them he would empower them for the his bold vision to be accomplished. And that’s what we see, starting in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost. After the Holy Spirit invades the hearts of the early believers he gives them boldness to proclaim and starts to help them craft their own piece of his bold vision of taking the good news to the ends of the earth.

Again here is the big idea of the passage: A bold vision to reach the lost starts in our hearts spreads to the streets and ends up at the ends of the earth.

So let’s break it down a bit and see exactly how it applies to us and to youth ministry.

1. A bold vision begins in our hearts.

a. The Holy Spirit gives us power to proclaim.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you…” Acts 1:8

If you’ve ever read about Atom Bombs and Nuclear Bombs it’s amazing when you realize that all of that power that is released is either from nuclear fission or nuclear fusion…it’s the breaking apart of atoms or the fusing together of atoms that releases massive amounts of energy…energy that is inherent in atoms in elements like Uranium. When a nuclear chain reaction happens and the power of these atoms are released the results are shocking and can be devastating.

But as powerful as nuclear fission and fusion can be its nothing compared to the power of the Holy Spirit. Whereas atom bombs destroys lives, the Holy Spirit regenerates souls. Whereas nuclear bombs trigger devastation, the Holy Spirit triggers proclamation.

And the Holy Spirit power to proclaim the good news of Jesus is always ready to explode in us and our teens when we simply pull the trigger of faith!

That power is stronger than an atom bomb…and it’s all available to us through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

b. The Holy Spirit gives us prompts to proclaim.

“When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.” John 15:26,27

Getting the prompt to share Christ with Katelyn Story of Katelyn at our Dare 2 Share Christmas party…Just a few weeks ago my wife and I were siting at our Dare 2 Share Christmas party and we met Katelyn, our server for the night. There was something about her that seemed broken inside. So my wife and I asked her how we could pray for her. She paused for a second and said, “Well, yeah, pray for me, I’m kind of going through some trouble right now.”

She paused again and said, “Well, I just got out of jail last month and I’m trying to get my life together.”

I said, “Wow Katelyn. I’m glad you are out of jail and that this restaurant hired you. How long were you in jail for?”

She said she went to jail for three years!

“What did you do to go to jail for three years?” I asked.

She paused for a second and then just said, “I stabbed a girl in the neck.”

Now, let me just pause and say, when you find out your server at a restaurant just got out of jail for stabbing a girl in the neck you make a conscious decision in that moment to tip at least 20%.

So we prayed for her right there on the spot and then she sat down at our table and my wife and I took her through the Gospel using an app and she put her faith in Jesus in that moment. And she’s gonna start going to church with us as a family.

She texted my wife the next morning and said, “Last night changed my life forever.”

We must be sensitive to the prompts God gives us, it’s kind of like a getting a notification on your phone, when you get one you pick up your phone and look at it, especially when you hear the ping…when the Holy Spirit pings us to share the Gospel, we must respond.

c. The Holy Spirit gives us plans to proclaim.

In John 15:26 and John 16:7 Jesus refers to the promised Holy Spirit as the Comforter, Advocate, Helper or Counselor depending on which translation you are reading.

In a way he is our coach as well. He comes alongside us and helps us begin to understand and apply God’s plan for our lives and ministries.

i. God has a fully customized Bold Vision for you and your youth group to advance the Gospel in your community.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” Hebrews 12:1

Look at those words “the race marked out for us.”

You have an individualized race that God has personally marked out for you to run. Your race is different than mine. It has different challenges, different twists and turns and terrains. But your goal is to make sure your on the right course, the race marked out for you.

I have youth leaders tell me from time to time. I wish I could do what you do. And my answer is this, “We both have the same job. It’s to stand the post God gave us. It’s to run the race that God has marked out for us.

Our bold vision at Dare 2 Share is “Every teen everywhere hearing the Gospel from a friend.” And our hope is that, in a way, youth leaders tear off a piece of that vision and own it as their own. Dare 2 Share doesn’t have staff in your community, unless you’re located in Arvada, Colorado, where our Headquarters is.

Another verse that’s a good reminder is 1 Cor. 9:23,24

“I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.” 1 Corinthians 9:23,24

The key phrase in this passage is “run in such a way as to get the prize.” If you are going to run your race, then run to win.

I'll never forget when long time youth pastor and discipleship guru, Matt Reagan, uttered a bold statement that made my heart leap. Last April he told a room full of North American youth ministry leaders, "Youth Ministry needs it's swagger back!"

Of course he didn't mean "swagger" in a prideful "look at me" type of way but in a holy confidence "God has called us to this" type of way.

Matt went on to explain that he was tired of youth ministry being underestimated, downplayed and, in some circles, even scorned. He shared with this room of key leaders how important an effective, Gospel advancing, disciple multiplying youth ministry is to the lifeblood of a thriving church. By the way his church is Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky.

Over the last several months as I've thought about Matt's bold statement I've become increasingly convinced he is right. Youth leaders need to walk with a holy, humble confidence that God can use them in powerful ways to reach and mobilize a generation for Jesus and that they are key contributors to the church at large

A key part of getting your youth ministry swagger back is discovering that bold vision, which leads us to the next point…

ii. You must seek out your bold vision in prayer, begin to make your plans to accomplish it and then adjust both along the way.

1. Jesus most likely forged his plans in the wilderness.

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him….” Matthew 4:1-3

Dann Spader, the founder of Sonlife, and expert on the life and ministry of Jesus, surmises that it was in the wilderness where Jesus, was not only tempted by the devil but was guided by the Holy Spirit to discover the Father’s bold vision for him. Because, right after he leaves the wilderness, he hits the ground running in Galilee. Look at Luke 4:14,15

“Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.” Luke 4:14,15

Do you need an extended time away to discover God’s bold vision for you and your youth ministry? That’s what a lot of youth leaders use Lead THE Cause for by the way. They come away to our full week student leadership event and take time to pray through, wrestle through and write out their bold vision for the year.

I think of Chris Selby when he first came to Lead the Cause and developed his bold vision. At the time he was a youth leader in Arkansas but God gave him a bold vision for the year of year of having 1,380 gospel conversations and 90 professions of faith, getting 50% into disciple multiplication relationships by the end of the school year.”

And then the outcome was: In just one year his youth group was able to have over 1,300 Gospel conversations and 140 put their faith in Jesus and double in size due to new believers being added to the group!

You should consider checking out lead the cause (leadthecause.org.)

Jesus got away to clarify his bold vision at the beginning of his earthly ministry. Then….

2. Jesus adjusted his plans along

“But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” Luke 5:16

Our plans are constantly changing and adjusting at Dare 2 Share. Think of it as a war-time situation…because it is! We are in a battle with Satan for the souls of the teens in our community. We must be ready to improvise, adapt and overcome as the battle rages around us. As has been said before in different ways, the best battle plans fall apart when the bayonet hits the bone.

Have you gotten away to pray to discover God’s bold vision for your youth group?

Are you often withdrawing to pray to adjust it and your plans to accomplish it?

2. A bold vision spreads across the streets.

“…and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria….” Acts 1:8

a. Our teens most immediate circles of influence (i.e. friends)

i. The teens they hang out with most consistently.

ii. The teens they interact online with most consistently.

Life in 6 Words app

· The app

· 14 words (explain… Julia, an online fashion guru from NYC, on the plane two weeks ago…didn’t trust in Jesus but she engaged)

· GOSPEL (face to screen to face…explain the Gospel)

· Cause Circle and faith sharing groups

Action: Have your teens download the Life in 6 Words app, create a group and lead the way personally.

b. Our teens extended circles of influence (i.e. classmates)

i. We must look at their schools as a mission field.

Give them a hallway vision of hell…going through and headed to…break their hearts for their friends. Help the parents of your teens, not just pack them a lunch but pack them with a passion to reach the lost.

ii. We must help them develop a “reach your school” strategy.

Everyschool.com

Claim your campus app

Logos for Campus Life… FCA…Young Life…First Priority

Action: Pick a campus strategy to focus on and get started.

c. Our teens expanded circles of influence (i.e. strangers)

In my junior and senior year of high school I led a ministry called “Quest” for my friends in youth group who wanted to actually go out and have Gospel conversations. It was powerful (describe what we would do!)

· Meet , pray and do a quick training. Break up into groups of two or three and then go to local malls or parks or wherever people were and have gospel conversations. After we’d come back, share stories and pray for those we were able to talk to.

· I knew that if we could share Jesus with strangers it would actually help give us boldness to share the gospel with our own friends, classmates, teammates and family members more consistently.

Action: Take your teens out monthly to share their faith with strangers, especially the poor, to give them a vision for the lost.

3. A bold vision ends up at ends of the earth.

“And you will be my witnesses…to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8

Action: Give every one of your teenagers at least one opportunity to go on a Gospel Advancing mission trip

Joan of Arc (portrait of Joan of Arc) was born in 15th Century France during a horrible time in history. France was just recovering from being devastated from the Black Plague and was being devastated by the 100 years war between England and France. The economy of France had been destroyed and there were questions and factions about who should be the true ruler of France.

But when Joan was only 13 years old she claimed that she had started to hear unearthly voices that called her to set Charles VII on the throne of France and begin to set the country in a trajectory that would free the French from English tyranny. She was sure it was God who was giving her a mission to accomplish. Although just a peasant girl she began to share her visions with leaders and eventually gained an audience with Charles VII who, although in line for the throne, was hesitant to take leadership during such a tenuous time. She told him that God had appointed her to lead him to the throne.

She was interrogated by the priests and theologians of Charles court and they were convinced that she was sincere. And, here’s where the story gets crazy, this teenager was so full of faith and focus that Charles allowed her to travel with the French army in the disguise of a knight.

But she was more than a novelty, she was a warrior. The army's commanders esteemed her as a skilled tactician and a successful strategist. Unlike the tentative French commanders of her day she was fierce and aggressive. She attacked the English relentlessly and led the military charge from the front. At one point she was wounded by an arrow but, after having it bandaged, joined the battlefront again. When the French soldiers around her saw her courage they were too convinced that she was on a mission from God. When asked if she was ever afraid in battle she answered, “I am not afraid…I was born to do this.”

At 19 years old Joan of Arc was captured by the English and burned at the stake. Before they lit the fire she asked two clergymen to hold a cross up to look at while she was being burned. She said, “Hold the cross high so I may see it through the flames." Eventually, due to her heroic effort, Charles VII was seated on the throne of France and, years late, the English were defeated and driven out of France, all because a teenager girl was convinced that God had spoken to her and she would not quit until her mission was accomplished.

Did God really speak to Joan of Arc when she was a teenager and give her the bold vision of setting Charles VII on the throne of France? I have no idea. But I do know this, God has a bold vision for you and your youth group. He is ready to help you discover it and empower you to accomplish it through his Holy Spirit.