

Living With A Bigger Vision

Just Walk Across the Room

In the 1930's one man in a church had a vision to paint a huge scripture verse on the side of a church building. 30 years later Judi Gibson was sitting on a bus stopped at traffic lights opposite that church, and she read that scripture. Each night, as she travelled home from work on the same bus, she would read that scripture. This was the scripture. **Jesus said "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)**

Each night, on her way home from work, Judi would read that same scripture. Something within her awakened, and she began to seek God. That scripture on the wall at the traffic lights eventually led her to putting her trust in Jesus Christ, and she became a Christian. One man's vision 30 years before resulted in a woman finding Christ. But the story doesn't end there. Judi eventually married, and she and her husband Greg became very successful with their own Real Estate business. Around the year 2004, Greg and Judi Gibson had a vision of their own. They were reflecting on how influential that piece of advertising had been in leading Judi to faith. They thought "What if we rented some advertising space on billboards that would lead people to think about God. Not advertising church, or getting in people's faces, but just getting them to think about a God who loved them.

So in 2005, huge black billboards with white print on them, began appearing all over Auckland city. Here are some of the messages motorists were reading as they were stuck in traffic.

(Billboard slides up on Power Point – One slide at a time – not too quickly)

- "I miss how you used to talk to me when you were a kid" - God
- "I love everyone, even Christians" - Jesus
- "I was just thinking about you" – God
- "Contrary to popular belief, I don't hate anyone who is gay" – Jesus

The billboard advertising was so successful; it was featured on TV news, in magazine articles and newspaper columns. Heaps of people phoned in to talkback radio talking about Jesus. The next year the idea spread to other cities around New Zealand. One of those billboards captured the attention of my eldest son. This is what he read.

- "I don't mind if you yell at me, at least we're talking" – God."

At that stage Alasdair was on what he called a "holiday from God". He had made such a mess of his life and felt bad about it. That message on a billboard prompted him to start talking to God about his life. It was one of the factors that led him back to a relationship with Jesus.

One of my favourite messages on those billboards was this one;

- "Every day I get more prayer requests for car parks than anything else. You people have to start thinking bigger. – God."

Start Thinking Bigger.

Greg and Judi Gibson were two people who had been thinking bigger. They had done very well in life, selling a lot of expensive real estate on the Auckland waterfront. But they came to the realisation that they needed a bigger vision. Bigger than selling more Real Estate. Bigger than making more money. Bigger than collecting more for themselves. They had a vision of doing something with their lives that was going to have eternal results. When they found that bigger vision, selling real estate didn't have the same attraction. For them, nothing compares with using what they have to point people toward Jesus.

So What Is Your Bigger Vision?

What are you doing with this one life God has given you? What are you doing that will have eternal results? When you stand before the Lord and he asks you what you did with all he put in your hands, what will you say to him? You see, unless we have a big vision, we spend our lives fiddling around with things that won't last for eternity.

Listen to this encounter that Jesus had with some fishermen who became his disciples.

"One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him. (Luke 5: 1- 11)

If there was one thing Peter thought he really knew something about, it was fishing. That's what he had spent his whole life doing. Peter lived fishing, day in and day out. It was his area of expertise. So when Jesus came along and told him how to fish, you can just about hear Peter muttering under his breath "Listen Jesus, you might be good at carpentry stuff, and you are pretty good at teaching people God's truth, but don't tell me how to fish. I've been doing this since I was knee high to a grasshopper. If there is one thing I do know something about, it's fishing. So don't try and tell me what to do."

Peter and his friends had worked the whole night long and caught nothing. Now they had washed their nets and cleaned up. So when Jesus tells him to head out again and have another try, I can't see Peter being full of enthusiasm. I think it was probably a pretty tired and grumpy Peter who went back out on that lake. Yet he and his friends pulled in a catch that was so big it nearly broke their nets and sank their boats. What was going on here? Was Jesus just trying to boost his business? Was it a statement to Peter that Jesus knew more about fishing than Peter did? Or was this about something else entirely?

Chase The Big Ones.

I think Jesus was showing Peter that there were two options open in front of him. He could spend the rest of his life chasing little fish in shallow water, or he could follow Jesus, get out into really deep water, and go after the big ones. In effect Jesus was saying, "Peter, if you do it my way, you will be out in deep water where the big fish swim. Come with me, and we will go fishing for the big ones". What Jesus was doing with Peter was giving him a vision of what he could do with the rest of his life. Those two boatloads of fish represented a foretaste of what Peter could do with the rest of his life. Jesus was saying to him "Peter, get a bigger vision. Get a vision of hundreds and thousands of men and women and boys and girls coming in to God's kingdom."

The Big Catch

And Peter and his friends got it. They got it so much they left the best catch they ever had, their boats, their nets, their whole business, and joined the Jesus Christ fishing company. They were going after the big ones. If you read through the New Testament, you will come to a book called the Acts of the Apostles. Peter was an Apostle. Do you know what his first act was? Fishing for people. On the day of Pentecost he stood up before thousands of people, and boldly preached that Jesus was the Christ. And that day, 3000 people came into the Kingdom of God. 3000 people who found life in Jesus, because one man decided instead of spending the rest of his life chasing small fish, he was going after the big ones.

What Does Big Vision Look Like?

Here's what big vision looks like. Big vision is when a mother says "I'm going to pour myself into my kids while they are still at home, so that they will grow up to know God and love him". Big vision is when a person in business says "I'm going to treat my employees with such love and grace that they will get to see Jesus close up. I'm going to let them see that God loves them". Big vision is when an au pair says "I'm going to let Jesus live his life out in me in my host family to such an extent that

they will know that Jesus really makes a difference". Big vision is when a wealthy person says "I'm going to live on less so the poor can find life through Jesus". For some of you, big vision means praying your family into the kingdom of God. Big vision looks different for each one of us. Part of my big vision is being here at Westlake. Many years ago, I started praying that the Lord would put me in a place where I could be the greatest influence in his Kingdom. Ever since I started praying that prayer, I've found myself in ministry situations I could never have dreamed up on my own. God has put me here amongst people of tremendous influence. If I can help you see what the Lord has put in your hands, and help you use it to grow the Kingdom of God, then I'm fulfilling the big vision God gave me.

Warning – Big Vision Will Ruin You Forever!

But here's a warning. Big vision that comes from the Lord will ruin you forever. For once you get a taste of what God can do through you, you will never want to fiddle around with the little stuff again. I don't have much time anymore for people who want to play church politics. I'm not all that interested in people who want to argue over the finer points of some obscure theological point. I have little sympathy for people who choose to keep holding on to grudges, nursing bruises and hurts that happened decades ago, when they have known about the forgiveness Christ offers. Do you know why? Because years ago I got spoiled with something good. Once you have seen something good, everything else seems pathetic.

When I was 28 years old, the Lord sent Lyn and I to a little church of 40 people. We saw God do something amazing in that church. People heard the gospel, and decided to become followers of Jesus. Students. Young people. Husbands and wives. Kids. We saw God changing people and making them new creations in Christ. It was wonderful. That little church began to grow, so that within four years, what had been 40 people was now 200 people. And 100 of those people had been baptised in that church in the past 4 years. I tell you, when you see 18 people choose to follow Christ on one Sunday, it ruins you for everything else. I remember that Sunday watching Ernie Beck. Ernie was a retired farmer in his mid seventies. He and his wife had helped start that church. Ernie was shaking his head, with tears rolling down his cheeks, saying "In all my years as a Christian, I've never seen anything like this". I tell you people, when you see God change a life, nothing else satisfies. When you have the joy of introducing someone to Jesus, you are ruined for life. Nothing else satisfies.

I don't know what the big vision is for you. You may have already found it. If you have, go for it! If you haven't found it yet, ask the Lord to show it to you. But whatever it is, remember this. The only thing you and I are going to take to heaven with us, are people. And for me, I want to take as many as I can.

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