



THE LINE

who?

the primary question for biblical vision

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introduction: the case for defining vision

“What is God calling me to do?”

“How should my Gospel Community pursue justice in the city?”

“Who does God want me to be an ambassador to?”

The attempt to define the calling of one’s life, vocation, and Christian community can sometimes be problematic. Questions arise: “Isn’t it dangerous to limit my vision? Shouldn’t the Spirit continuously inform my calling? How do I narrow focus *and* retain flexibility?”

Although defining visions presents challenges, we can easily find Biblical precedents for doing so. The number of men and women with clear, well-defined vision and calling in Scripture are numerous. For example:

1. Abraham was called to leave his home and father a nation (Gen 12:1-4)
2. Moses was called to lead Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 3:10)
3. Nehemiah was burdened to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:1-11)

4. The Apostle Paul was charged to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Ephesians 3:8; Galatians 1:16; 1 Timothy 2:7; etc.)
5. Jesus Christ had access to the limitless resources, yet Jesus Himself frequently spoke of the limits of His calling (Luke 19:10; Mark 8:31-33; Matthew 9:12-13).

As such, we should feel comfortable both with 1. the exercise of prayerfully asking God what His plan is for our time, talents, and treasure, and 2. acknowledging that His purpose for these things might find increasingly clear definition as time goes on.

how should vision be defined?

This raises the question of *how* a vision should be defined. How are we to know what God is calling us to do? Consider the following principles

1. God will never call His people to a vision that contradicts something He has already said in Scripture (1 John 4:1-2; Acts 17:10-11; 2 Peter 1:19-21). A vision or calling that is not in alignment with God's Word is not in alignment with God. God's word is our primary authority, and the leadings of His Spirit will always be in alignment with it.
2. God's calling on a person will always reflect His calling on His people (see, for instance, the purpose of the gifts in Ephesians 4:8-13; the purpose of the overseer in Titus 1:7). We will never be called to a secondary calling that overrides our primary calling to *make disciples* (Matthew 28:19), to be *sent into the world to do so* (John 20:21; Acts 1:8), and to *make known God's wisdom and glory* as the church (Ephesians 3:10).
3. Thus, God's calling on both the corporate body of Christ and the individuals within that body will be primarily concerned with 1. His *glory in Jesus* and 2. His *mission to people*. We see this as the purpose of God is revealed throughout scripture:
 - a. Abraham: God tells Abraham that 1. He will make his name great, "so that you will be a blessing... in you all the nations of the earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:2-3), and 2. the purpose of his journey is God's revelation of Himself (14:22; 16:13; 17:8; 21:6; 22:12; c.f. Hebrews 11:10).
 - b. Moses: Moses is called to lead Israel out of exile, 1. because God has "seen the affliction of [His] people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters" (Exodus 3:7), and 2. so that "you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians." (6:7)
 - c. Nehemiah: Nehemiah undertakes the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem after 1. hearing news of the oppressed remnant in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:3-5), and 2. praying that God would remain true to His promises and

- character. After the wall is built, it is clear that the purpose of the entire enterprise is the display of God's glory (Nehemiah 6:15-16; 8)
- d. Paul: Paul constantly describes his calling as *to* a people, *and for* God's glory. To Timothy, for instance, he says, 1. "For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth." (1 Timothy 2:7), and the "this" that he refers to is 2. the revelation of God's glory in Jesus in the previous two verses (5-6). Paul endures 1. "everything for the sake of the elect," 2., "that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2:10).
 - e. Jesus: It is clear from Scripture that the climax of Jesus' mission was his sacrificial death on the cross (Mark 8:31-32; John 2:4; 7:8; 12:20-28). On the cross, God accomplished His twofold mission: 1. To seek and save sinners (Luke 19:10; Matthew 9:12-13), and 2. to glorify Himself (John 12:27-28; 17:1)

the primary question: who?

The primary question of calling, then, is not "What?" or "How?" but "Who?" In giving Jesus and people (the "Who?" of calling) first importance, we ensure that our priorities remain God's priorities.

If we make "What?" primary, our vision will likely be defined by *new ideas* and *attractive personalities*. If we make "How?" primary, our vision will likely be defined by *pragmatics* and *planning*. New ideas, attractive personalities, pragmatics, and planning may be helpful components of a sustainable vision, but they cannot be given precedence over Jesus and people. It is possible for a vision to be Biblical without new ideas, but it's impossible for a vision to be Biblical without Jesus and people.

what and how from who

Giving the question of "Who?" primacy ensures that questions of "How?" and "What?" are answered appropriately.

A church planter might dream that the "What?" of his calling includes ambient-trance worship music, but if the "Who?" of his calling is tribes in the South American Jungle, his *new idea* must be laid aside. Similarly, a manager at a local supermarket might consider that the "How?" of his calling is four years in Bible school and three more in Seminary, but if the "Who?" of his calling is the team which he currently manages, other means of training should be pursued.

When we seek God and determine the specific “Who?” of His calling on our lives first, it seems that the “What?” and “How?” readily fall into place.

The Church planter who is called preach Jesus to jungle tribes in South America (Who) knows that he must develop a vision for what the church should look like there, which must be informed by countless hours of research concerning and immersion in the tribes themselves, and careful analysis of the tribe’s value system against that of the Bible (What). At this point, the “How?” is simple: The planter splits his time appropriately between immersion in the tribes and formal studies through whatever methods of formal education are available to him on the field.

The manager who considers himself Jesus’ missionary to his team at the supermarket (Who) must have a vision for a supermarket where workers and managers value what God values (What). Here again, the “How” of this vision falls more simply into place after the primary question is answered: If the manager leaves his job to pursue formal education, he loses a valuable relational connection to the people he is called to. Hence, he must pursue theological mentoring and training through other channels.

“who?” lasts

In addition, visions and callings that rely solely on questions of “What?” or “How?” are much less resilient than those who first ask “Who?” Plans change. Jesus doesn’t. A new idea is easy to criticize. A heart for people is not. It is hard to imagine Paul saying, “I endure everything for the sake of a new way of doing church.”

who is the line?

The vision of The Line will always be defined in terms of “Who?” We will evaluate ourselves, our ideas, our strategy, and our success based on this primary question.

Our answer to the “Who?” of our calling is the product of much prayer, research, conversation with other church leaders, and general immersion in the cultures of Chicago. The “Who?” of our vision can be prioritized as follows:

1. *Jesus*. Our first calling is to Jesus. We know that *any* vision for fruitfulness we might have will be predicated on our saturation in Jesus (John 15:4-7). Jesus is both our journey and our destination (Romans 12:1; Ephesians 2:7; etc.). Our vision is to Him, through Him.
2. *City-Center Chicago*. Our secondary calling is to the city-center of Chicago. The city-center of Chicago primarily consists of cultures of expertise in vocation, education, and the arts. Life in Chicago’s city-center revolves around vocational pursuit of singular disciplines, coupled with pursuit of deep, emotional social

- experiences. Social interactions and networks often revolve around one's vocation, making for deeply insular, seemingly self-sufficient communities.
3. *One Another.* As the city is redeemed and a church is formed, The Line begins to fulfill the calling of a church: to serve, encourage, build up, and equip its members. This calling is should not be seen as replacing our calling to City-Center Chicago, but as a continuation of it.
 4. *Chicago Proper.* Our tertiary calling is to influence Chicago proper toward Jesus *through* city-center Chicago. Although the social workers of the city-center are not likely to associate with their clients after-hours, their influence on their clients should not be overlooked. Educators, musicians, social workers, lawyers, politicians – all of these are found in the city-center and all deeply influence the city as a whole. Indeed, it should be expected that some members of The Line see the poorer and less educated citizens of the city as their primary calling.
 5. *World Culture.* The culture created in city-center Chicago influences world culture. As such, we earnestly and delightedly expect that influencing Chicago culture towards Jesus will influence world culture towards Jesus.

questions for reflection

1. Am I more prone to put the “What?” or “How?” of my calling before the “Who?”
2. Do you feel that God is calling you to a specific *kind* of person (i.e., a tribe, neighborhood, socioeconomic class, etc.?)
3. Name two people that you feel God is calling you to pray for and be an ambassador on His behalf to.
4. How does this calling clarify your own questions of “What?” and “How?”