Join // Walk // Read // Pray // Commit

VISION

Collect - *What one thing would you like to see change in your life in the next five years? In the next 10? In the next 20?*

Context and Content:

HOPE

We've all gone through times where we have lost hope. Sometimes our situation looks so hopeless that we want to quit trying. Life knocks us down again and again; it's easy to lose hope. But it is often not the flashiest or most gifted people who succeed. It is often humble, dependable people who tenaciously refuse to give up. They're the ones who keep the wheels turning in any organization.

The apostle Paul was that kind of person. In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, he wrote:

'Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.'

Paul's outlook allowed him to undergo intense hardship and pain with an unwavering faith in God. For Paul, it wasn't as much a matter of will and determination as it was a matter of vision and perspective. However long our stay here is, compared to eternity, it's not even a blip on the screen. But our inner self is actually growing stronger as our outer self is growing weaker. That's how it's supposed to be.

Discuss: What do you think of when Paul writes of fixing our eyes on 'what is unseen'?

Our hardships on this earth are temporary; the glory we will inherit is eternal. Our troubles are light; eternal glory is weighty. In Romans 8:18 Paul says, 'I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.' That is not a perspective we will find reinforced in the pages of the Wall Street Journal or Vogue Magazine. That perspective is not found in the world; it is found only in the Word. By basing our outlook on what we find in the Bible, we can suffer in hope because we know that God's glorious future for us will somehow reach back, redemptively, into the pain of our past and cause even that to work for our ultimate benefit.

In some ways, we can say that wisdom is the God-given ability to see the true nature of things. In addition to everlasting life with him, God gives us a new way of looking at things in the here and now. He gives us the ability to see things as they really are, to see truth and not merely facts. By the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, the blinders are taken off so that we can see temporary things in light of eternity. God gives us the gift of vision, and his vision allows us to see our present reality in light of eternity.

Discuss: What have you found helpful to inspire hope in moments of hopelessness? What practices encourage you? What habits remind you of God's goodness?

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Few things are more important to effective discipleship than vision. Biblical leaders often first had a vision of who God is and the future he holds for them. They also had a sense of what God has called them to do. The apostle Paul had both. Through a miraculous vision, he was taken into heaven where he saw images too spectacular to communicate; images he wasn't allowed to communicate:

'I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know – God knows. And I know that this man – whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows – was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say.' - 2 Corinthians 12:1-6

Paul was given a vision from God – a vision that enabled him to withstand trials and temptations without giving up. But there was a second vision Paul possessed. The first was of heaven, the second was a vision of his earthly ministry among the Corinthians. He knew God had called him to minister to the Gentiles (Romans 1:5), and he knew that the Lord was directing him to return to the Corinthians a third time. Elsewhere he spoke about his vision to take the gospel to Rome and Spain (Romans 15:23-24).

Discuss: How have you experienced God giving you vision for your life and dreams for the future? Do you feel God ever giving you words and pictures for people or for yourself when you pray? How does that make you feel?

While God may not give you a vision of heaven like Paul experienced, he will give you one of himself. Through his Word, he will show you what he is like and will give you insight into your spiritual destiny. As you seek him through his Word and through prayer, ask him to show you himself, a clear image of the work he has called you to join him in accomplishing.

The Word suggests that God alone can ultimately authenticate our existence. We do what we do with excellence for him and let him take care of the issues of significance and satisfaction, since he alone is the source of contentment.

Challenge - God may be calling you to serve him in many ways but without a vision of who he is. What has been part of your story up until now that God may be wanting to use to give others hope and minister his goodness through? *Spend some time in quiet reflection asking God to reveal one or two areas of your life that you can serve him in.*

Connect - In twos or threes, gather and ask God for words and pictures for each other to encourage and build one another up in hope. Allow time and space for people to process all they have heard and what their own personal response may be.

N.B. Over the next three weeks at HTB, we are going to be encouraging everyone to pray, everyone to serve, and everyone to give. Why don't you finish by asking the group which one of those they are most challenged by and why?