

## MOVING TOWARD A VISION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

by Bob Moffitt

This article will explore ministry implications of the relationship between development and a vision of the Kingdom of God. We will begin our reflections with the following propositions:

First, we will define development. In *The Church in Response to Human Need*, I defined development:

. . . every biblically-based activity of the Body of Christ, His Church, which assists in bringing a person toward the place of complete reconciliation with God, and complete reconciliation with his fellow and his environment."<sup>1</sup>

Here, I will use a shorter working definition, easier to remember and equally useful. It is "growth toward God's intentions."

Second, for the purpose of our discussion, we will equate the Kingdom of God with "God's realized intentions"—or God's realized will, desire, and intentions for His creation in both the present and future. In some theological circles, "Kingdom of Heaven" is the term used for the present expression of God's intentions; and "Kingdom of God" is used for the future, eschatological expression that will be established after Christ's second coming.

Third, Kingdom communities (local churches) and Kingdom persons (followers of Jesus, the King) are ambassadors, representing God's intentions to—and for—the parts of His creation to which God has sent them. These parts of creation include family, friends, church, work colleagues, local and global communities, and all the rest of creation. The mission of Kingdom ambassadors, individually or corporately, is to:

- Understand God's intentions
- Model God's intentions
- Go where God's intentions need to be known
- Proclaim, serve, and assist others to grow toward God's intentions

On the basis of the above statements, I share the following observations for consideration. They are not final conclusions, but thoughts to stimulate thinking and discussion.

### Developing a Vision

Representing God's intentions to the various parts of His creation requires "seeing" His intentions. How do we develop, obtain, or catch such a vision? We do it by allowing God to develop a vision in us. This vision can be developed through:

- Biblical descriptions of God's intentions for man and the rest of creation
- Prayer and meditation—waiting on God

- Observation, study, and reflection on God's work—our own and others' experiences
- Testing of our perception of God's intentions in the crucible of life, to see whether or not the results are fruits of the Kingdom—the fruits of the Spirit

### **Seeking a Vision Together**

It can be dangerous if a vision of God's intentions is developed by followers of Jesus who are isolated from other believers and from other participants in the vision. Ideally, a vision of God's intentions should emerge as Christians seek God's intentions together, in collaboration with other members of the Kingdom. Further, those the vision is for—or about—should also participate in its development.

### **The Vision is Dynamic**

God's intentions don't change. However, our understanding of them will develop, clarify, and appear to change as God reveals His plans through a progression of experiences. Unless we have closed ourselves to God's process of development in our own lives, our vision of God's intentions will not be static—that is, the vision will not remain the same. As long as we are people who learn and grow, our vision of God's intentions will be dynamic—that is, the vision will continue to develop and become refined and clarified.

### **The Vision is Planned**

Movement toward God's intentions will be more effective if there is a carefully considered and executed plan for growth. Development that is haphazard will probably waste time and resources. Yet, because a vision of God's intentions is dynamic, we can never arrive at a point where we can present a "fixed" or final plan for the development or growth of a person or community.

### **The Vision is Specific**

The more specific, practical, and applicable our vision of God's intentions can be, the better it is. For example, it is not very useful to say that God intends that the people of a poor community have their basic physical health met. It is more helpful to articulate the specifics of our understanding of God's intentions. For example, a vision for better physical health in the community might include the following:

- Water that is potable and reasonably accessible
- Food that is regularly available and culturally acceptable, that meets nutritional requirements for strong bodies
- Shelter that is sufficient to provide privacy and protection from the environment
- Sanitation facilities that protect all members of the community from contamination.

### **The Vision is Balanced**

Development efforts should reflect God's concern for all areas of man's growth.

Many missions efforts of the evangelical church focus heavily on the spiritual area, excluding or minimizing God's concern for physical or social areas. On the other hand, Christian relief and development efforts tend to focus on meeting social and physical needs, but they neglect to communicate God's spiritual intentions. I believe that an unbalanced ministry focus is a heresy that requires repentance and corrective action.

God's concern for man's development includes at least the four areas that are described in Jesus' development in Luke 2:52. These areas are wisdom development, physical development, spiritual development, and social development. Missions efforts of the church and of its individual members should be based on the need to move toward God's intentions in all of these dimensions.

One of the tragic legacies of the evangelical missionary movement of this century is its overreaction to the "social gospel." As a consequence, many Third World evangelical churches—the spiritual children of this movement—have not been aware of their biblically mandated role of ministry to the whole man. The missionary movement did not demonstrate or teach that the local church should serve the community incarnationally as it moves toward maturity in all aspects of life, proclaiming God's design and desire for wholeness.

### **God's Institution for Transmitting Vision**

I believe that the local church is God's principal institutional entity for the proclamation and demonstration of God's intentions for the local community. Ephesians 3:10 clearly indicates that the church is God's instrument for making His plans known. Local churches, not parachurch organizations, were the principal vehicles through which this happened in New Testament communities. Parachurch organizations, however, are part of the universal church—they can and often do serve vital functions in God's plan of redemption and restoration.

Since 1986 Harvest has been developing a model which reflects this conviction. In this model, local churches—not Harvest—are the primary vehicles for ministry. Harvest's task is to help local churches develop vision and strategy to move their communities toward God's intentions. When these churches implement their emerging visions, we often see considerably more measurable impact for the Kingdom than when they carried out their traditional ministries.

### **God's Persons for Transmitting Vision**

If the local church is the primary institutional vehicle for proclaiming and advancing God's intentions in a community, what role do individuals play? Individual Christians need to be concerned about the development of the people with whom God has placed them in personal relationship.

I work in Christian ministry vocationally, but I can easily avoid the implications of this truth. If I am not careful, I easily "bury" myself in the mission and ministry of Harvest and neglect applying the principles to my ministry responsibilities closest to home. As a husband, I should be one of God's principal development agents for my wife. As a father, I need to be one of God's principal development agents for my children. As the director of Harvest, I should be a development agent for our staff. I need to see and accept my role as one of God's development agents in the relationships God has given me, especially in the relationships for which He has given me responsibility or oversight. As a development agent, I have the responsibility to explore God's intentions for and with my wife, children, and staff. Then, I need to be a servant, a catalyst, an encourager to help ensure the necessary conditions for growth toward the emerging vision of God's intentions.

## Development of the Visionary

Finally, individual kingdom ambassadors need to develop personally, growing toward God's intentions for themselves. The place to begin the ministry of reaching out to others is in personal development. Practically, that means that all Christians should be in continual exploration of God's intentions for their lives. They should be "intentionalizing" a plan to grow toward a specific, balanced vision for each major area of their lives. Unless we as individual Christians are experiencing personal development, it is foolish to expect that God will use us in ministry to others.

## In Summary

God desires that we understand and move toward His intentions—for individuals and for the world. He paid a great price to make it possible for broken man to move toward restoration. Although it is difficult to understand why, He decided to use redeemed but not yet fully restored man to be the servant-ambassadors of His love. Christians involved in that process are personal development agents of God's Kingdom, sent to proclaim and minister God's healing.

The local church is God's chosen and primary institutional vehicle for that healing. However, if local churches are going to be effective healing agents in their communities, then individual Christians must be open to God's progressive revelation of His intentions. When this transformation takes place in our own lives, God can use us to encourage others. In other words, this process of moving toward a vision of God's intentions must begin with us—in our own lives.

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<sup>1</sup>Bob Moffitt, "The Local Church in Development," in *The Church in Response to Human Need*, ed. Tom Sine (California: Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center, 1983), 373.

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