

Running with **VISION**

*“Write the vision; make it plain on tablets,
so he may run who reads it”*

- Habakkuk 2v 2



Session #5: VISIONS OF CHALLENGE

Paul and the heavenly hotline

Acts Chapter 16 & 18

Sladebrook Evangelical Church

www.sladebrook.org.uk

Introduction and Aim of this Teaching Series:

If we are seeking after New Testament Christianity today, pursuing a biblical vision for the church is essential. Yet vision is not merely a case of conjuring up new ideas to combat spiritual malaise. Nor should it ever become a knee jerk reaction to the need of the hour, the whim of the people, or the constantly changing culture.

David once exclaimed “*I saw the Lord always before me...*” (Ps. 16v 8). Biblical vision is just that: constantly looking for the Lord to lead with a passion to be in His presence, a desire to serve His purposes and an expectation that He will always make the difference. When we genuinely *look unto Jesus*, faith starts to rise, vision forms and the road becomes clear. Ironically, *pursuing biblical vision* requires not so much that we come up with a new way of doing things, but that we return to the paths already found in Scripture, and rediscover their rewarding route.

In this new teaching series we will be ***Running with Vision***, looking at what happens when God grants heavenly revelation to His people. Each week we will study a specific God-given vision from the Bible and apply some key questions: *What was happening at the time? What was the vision like? What was God saying to/expecting from His people? How should Christians respond today?*

As we explore this collection of God-encounters, the aim is to see how these amazing visions communicated God’s purposes to people who so desperately needed to embrace them at the time. May we also seek to be obey the heavenly vision of all that God reveals to us, that we might pursue a brave, biblical vision for our own lives and church in this generation, embracing all that Jesus intends for us today.

Running with VISION #5: VISIONS OF CHALLENGE

Since his Damascus road encounter, Paul experienced incredible things in the name of the same Jesus he once persecuted. By the time he embarked on his second missionary journey the momentum in his ministry had grown: the blessing of conversions, healings, and new churches abounded. Yet Paul was about to experience something new: A closed door. No doubt his desire to reach the lost people of Asia Minor was a huge and legitimate spur to continue southwest towards Ephesus. Yet God had other plans and His purposes must always override the convictions of even the most determined disciple.

One night God re-charted Paul's course with a clear and contrary vision. In it he saw a man from Macedonia standing and begging for Paul and his companions to "come over and help." (16v 9) Having concluded that it was of the Lord, Paul and his travel companions moved quickly in response to take the good news not only to Macedonia, but into Europe - a whole new continent.

We can often assume we are in the current of God's will: Scripture doesn't conflict with what we are doing, the outward signs seem to point a certain way and our convictions couldn't be clearer. Yet, if God has other ideas, we must be open to swift and radical change. Because much of what we attempt is plausible, it is almost unthinkable to imagine He would have us do otherwise! But in this vision of challenge, Paul heard directly from heaven's hotline and was abruptly called to an about turn; to lay down his own strategy and embrace a new one.

As Paul's journey unfolded, he had another necessary vision, this time in Corinth. Wherever Paul proclaimed Christ, great blessing followed, but great confrontation too! Although Paul was strong in the Lord and with an enviable faith, he was also human and surely daunted by some of the reactions he received. So once again, in the quiet of the night, the Lord spoke directly into the challenges he faced: The vision both comforted Paul and galvanized him to press on. With a reassuring reminder, God exhorted him to not be afraid, but to keep on speaking, for not only was He present with Paul, His people were all around him.

Visions can both challenge and comfort: Here, a call to change direction and a reminder that God's protective promise is real made a huge difference. It requires deep trust in God to surrender our strategies and relinquish our fears. But when we do, we can run with vision wherever God wants us, confident that He is always in control.

Read: Acts Chapter 16 & 18

A Vision that redirects: - Acts 16v 6-10:

When we don't go where God wants

A Vision that reassures: - Acts 18v 9-11:

When we don't see what God sees

Running with VISION:

Discuss:

- *The Holy Spirit kept Paul from preaching the word in Asia and prevented them from entering Bithynia. (16v 6-7) Why would the Spirit keep them from spreading the gospel in Asia?*
- *How much do you think the Holy Spirit controls your life? Your decisions, attitudes and actions? (cf. 16v 6-7) How can you tell?*
- *How might the Holy Spirit stop a person or a church from going in a wrong direction? What would be a good checklist?*
- *Have you ever felt the Holy Spirit's leading you to a certain place or preventing you from going? If so, what was that like?*
- *How many churches are there in Bath? Does it inspire, frustrate or depress you? How should churches partner in the Gospel??*

Pray:

Are you currently headed in a direction the Holy Spirit doesn't want you to go in? Pray for Him to convict you of the right way forward. Also, thank God for the many people he has in this city and pray for courage and for opportunities to speak up about your faith.

Respond:

How can you commit to the Spirit's leading in your life? Remember to pray before you study the Bible and ask / expect the Holy Spirit to speak to you through God's Word and to direct your walk this week.