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*Nazarene Essentials* Sermon #4
Chapter: Our Nazarene Characteristics: Church Development, Transformational Leadership, Purposeful Compassion

**Advancing the Gospel**

**Introduction**

Justin is the name of a real life person with a real life vision of what he wanted to accomplish. He grew up in the typical American home and went to your typical American school. All was going well in his life until his junior high years. There in the midst of adolescence circumstances began to change for him. Justin became the victim of bullying. It has been said that if you want someone to die a slow death all you need to do is belittle them with words, and Justin discovered this truth in harsh reality. He discovered how much it hurts when other teens pick on you. He felt the deep inner pain as he was told repeatedly that no one liked him. He knows what it’s like to be invited to a birthday party for the sole purpose to be told that he was not “cool enough” to be there. He discovered how much it hurt inside to have food thrown at him, and to not be able to eat a meal at lunch without others finding ways to make themselves look better at his expense. He learned by the age of 13 what it was like to live in depression. He lived the pain of those years and wanted to find a way out, and find a way out he did.

Justin discovered a sport called wrestling, and as it turns out, he was pretty good at it. He thought that if could work hard enough he could gain respect. He thought if he could get big enough and strong enough, everyone would leave him alone; they would be forced to respect him. Isn’t it interesting how words can either destroy you or empower you? Having heard the negative words during junior high, Justin discovered some coaches who began to say positive words to him. So much so, that they gave him a goal. They believed Justin was good enough to win a state championship, and told him to go home and write “State Champion” in his bedroom at a place where he would see it every day. That coaching…that reinforcement of his inner gifts and abilities…that constructive encouragement in his life gave him a dream…a vision! Justin went home and instead of writing “State Champion” on the wall, he went home and wrote “National Champion”. From that day forward, driven by the desire to finally be someone, he worked hard every day, and listened to the instruction of his coaches to become a champion. Not only did he become a state champion, but also Justin became a two time National High School Champion.

Justin started in wrestling because of deep pain in his life, and because he wanted the bullying to stop. But his vision for what he could become came from the words of his coaches pushing him for more. They were helping him have faith that what he was envisioning was not that far off; it could be achieved.

There are some important principles we should discover from this story.

1. Without vision there is no achievement or advancing. For the purpose of our discussion today, we will call this: Church Development

2. Without coaches or leaders, the vision cannot be realized. We will call this: Transformational Leadership

3. There are people all around who have been mistreated like Justin was as a child who need a “hope and a future” (Jer. 29:11) We will title this: Purposeful Compassion

**I. Church Development (Without Vision there is no advancing…)**Make no mistake about it, God wants the gospel to advance. The Church of the Nazarene, as we have discussed, believes that God wants every person to come to repentance. We believe that the gospel is for everyone. As such, we believe that God births within the hearts of men and women just like us the vision to advance the gospel. To take the message of Christ and His salvation to areas that don’t know about His love. Whether those areas are around the world, or in our neighbor’s home next door, we believe that God wants each of us to have a vision and a heart for the lost. As those visions come into focus, God wants us to follow in faith.

That is exactly what Paul did in Acts 16.

*Scripture:
Acts 16:9-10 (NIV)
6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.
7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.
8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.
9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”
10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

A. Paul’s vision involved a specific region. This vision wasn’t the result of his own desires; it didn’t come from the words of other men. No, this vision came from the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Notice (verse 7) that the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to enter Bithynia. God had other plans for them that involved them going to Troas, where Paul has a vision of a man from Macedonia asking them to come and help them.

B. This vision wasn’t a map of how to get there, and a systematic plan of what to do once they arrived. This vision was revealed to Paul progressively as he continued to take steps in faith. In fact, if you continue reading Acts 16, you find that the vision God gave Paul about a man from Macedonia turned out to be a woman. God’s vision to us, is revealed progressively because it requires us moving and working in faith. If God were to reveal everything at once, it wouldn’t require faith.

C. What about you? Has God given you a vision, a heart, a calling to reach others? Remember where He leads He will empower because for the vision to become reality we need.

**II. Transformational Leadership (Without leaders the vision cannot be realized)**Every vision, every calling, every dream starts and stops with the provision of the Spirit. You notice in our story of Justin it was the coaches who gave Justin the vision of what he could become and then helped him realize the dream. In our story from Acts, Paul was the leader who God inspired to see what could happen and his travel companions Silas and Timothy followed with him. It cannot be stressed enough - Leadership is important. God uses leaders to help people see the vision of what God wants to accomplish. In fact, without leaders the vision cannot be realized. Let’s look at two quick passages that illustrate this point.
*Scripture:
Proverbs 29:18 (KJV)
Where there is no vision the people perish…
Habakkuk 2:2 (NIV)
Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.*A. How many churches who have lost their vision are dying? The Lord uses leadership to propel the church to what it should be doing, and where it should be going. It is important for every person in our church who is in a leadership role to understand this importance. If the leaders are not in tune with the heart of God, and are not listening to His voice and His direction, the people will perish. Those in our community and world will die without knowing the love of Christ. Our own church can decline and die because we have no excitement and zeal for the voice or heart of God. Perhaps today more than any other day in the history of the church, we need leaders who share the heart and passion of Christ. Why?

B. Our Habakkuk passage tells us. God inspires leaders who in turn transmit the vision so that a herald may run with it…or in our case so that the people can see the plan through. A close look at Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 will tell us that God has given the gift of leadership to some and other spiritual gifts to others with the overarching goal that the body of Christ may be built up so the gospel will be advanced.

C. Transformational leaders are Christlike leaders who share the heart and passion of Christ, and desire to take Him to places and people that don’t know of His love. The divine leadership of the Spirit emboldens and impassions them to:

* To think strategically.
* To be team builders.
* To invest in others.
* To clearly communicate.
* To be the “lead follower” in following Jesus.

Transformational Leadership means that one is striving in all facets of life to be like Jesus Christ in elevating others value and worth ahead of their own. A transformational leader looks to the needs of others before themselves...why?
**III. Purposeful Compassion (There are people all around who need a “hope and a future”)**Compassion is defined as: *a feeling of deep sympathy for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering.*A. Compassion is the heart of a loving God. Who sees our predicament, who understands our misfortune, who sees our need for salvation, who recognizes our need for forgiveness from sin, and then does something about it. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us, and gave everything He had to provide a way for our redemption and in the process calls us to live in the same compassion.

*Scripture:*
1 John 3:16-18

*16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.
17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?
18 Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

B.* Compassion toward others is not merely a responsibility once I accept Christ. Similarly it is not just an action step. We could call it a mandate from the heart of God, but even that reduces it to something that we have to do. Purposeful Compassion is the direct result of the love of God living in our hearts. It is something that is put into action, not merely speech. It is the willingness to be involved in others’ lives to help them and assist them. It comes from a desire to alleviate their suffering with sin, so that they can have eternal life with Jesus Christ.

C. All of humanity was stricken with the same misfortune. We are all in need of the Savior. Once we have accepted Him, and He has transformed our lives, we are compelled to love others the way He loves them because we have the way, the truth and the life living inside of us. He can alleviate their suffering and give them a hope and a future and all He is waiting on is for us to get purposeful in our compassion.

When was the last time you had sympathy for someone who was lost in sin so much that you wanted help them meet the Savior?

**Conclusion**

For the Gospel to advance effectively it takes Vision, Leadership, and Compassion. Today God may be speaking to you. He may be giving you a vision for a ministry or person that only you can reach. He may be calling you to leadership, or reaffirming your commitment to be the leader He has called you to be. He may be rekindling the love for others outside of our church with compassion to share His love with them. However He is speaking to us, He wants us to respond in obedience, for there are many other Justin’s in the world who need someone, in the midst of their suffering to help them see their potential in Christ.