

Vision In Action

Devotional

Dear Villager:

This devotional is an invitation to take a few minutes at the beginning of each day to read and reflect upon a passage of scripture and what that passage means for you and for our church family. These devotionals have been prepared and compiled by fellow Villagers with the hope that they will move us toward our understanding of where God is leading us individually and corporately.

As we ask the question of God, “Lord, what do You want to do through me to realize Your vision for Village?” we must turn to the scriptures so that we can hear God through His Word. The first seven days we will examine Village's vision statement. The next seven days will be devoted to studying one of the great stewardship passages in the Bible: 2 Corinthians 8:1-15.

Take the time to hear God in His Word and in prayer. Allow Him to speak to you in relation to the faithful stewardship of your resources. What might God do through us to extend our reach in this community and the world if we fervently seek to hear His voice? What would God do through our church if together we would release all our resources to His use?

Whatever He does with us, it will be more than we ever imagined! Let us dream, and together, like Nehemiah, move forward to build our own wall and repair our broken world. Let us return to the foundation of what it means to be a radical church.

— Pastor John Johnson

Day One

Principle: Purpose

Scripture: Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.
Acts 2:46-47

Thoughts: Judging by the behavior of most churches, we have lost our way and missed the primary call of the church. We tend to be more a crowd than a community. We tend to come in our self absorption, missing completely how desperate the person we sit next to might be. In our discomfort with going deep, we keep our conversations at the safe, superficial level and miss the profound connection God intended between His Spirit in us and His Spirit in others. In our fear of being hurt, we keep to ourselves. In gracelessness, we bind disciples into lockstep patterns of expectations that shame people who do not act like us.

We envision Village to be a church of *radical* connections. By radical, we mean a going back to the root – to what is inherent in the church. What is the root of the church? The church, at its core, is called to be a community of restorative grace, bringing believers to spiritual maturity with the ultimate aim of Christ-likeness.

Over the next two weeks, we'll look together at who God has called us to be as individuals and as a church, and what actions are required of us to be a radical church.

Reflection: Am I helping my church fulfill its God-given purpose? How can I better use my uniqueness to build up the Body of Christ?

Prayer: Lord, how will You use me to help Village be the radical church You are calling it to be?

Day Two

Principle: Grace

Scripture: Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.
Galatians 6:1-2

Thoughts: We envision Village to be a church where failure connects with grace, as we are all welcomed into God's arms, despite our sins.

God's Word tells us that God is capable of, even passionate about, putting broken people back together again. That's the main message of the gospel, the reason for the Cross. Most of us know this, but we often overlook that His most important instrument for piecing brokenness back together is the church.

Too often the image of the church is that of people who are better at dis-gracing than extending grace. We have resolved that Village must be a place of restoration, of grace covering failure. After all, we are all walking wounded. At times we may wonder if our world can ever be rebuilt. God's answer is *yes* – if the church is true to its real purpose.

What will it take?

- 1) We need to position ourselves to receive the Spirit's fullness. "You who are spiritual," you who are keeping in step with the Spirit, need to be positioned to receive the Spirit's fullness.
- 2) We need to submit ourselves to release the Spirit's forgiveness and show grace. Let's never forget that the Spirit fills us not to be stored up but to be released. We tend to write off people who disappoint, but we must remember that God has made room for us. Unless we make the same room, broken worlds do not get rebuilt. We need to extend hope, minister grace, confront sin, acknowledge weakness, and hold up broken people.

Reflection: Am I positioned to receive the Spirit's fullness? Do I offer forgiveness and show grace when others disappoint me?

Prayer: Lord, help me to be full of grace, open to receiving your Spirit's fullness, overflowing grace to those around me. Give me eyes to see those needing grace and boldness to extend Your love to those in need.

Day Three

Principle: Fullness

Scripture: What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? Ecclesiastes 1:3

Thoughts: We envision Village to be a church where emptiness connects with fullness, as we find our deepest longings satisfied in worshiping God.

Will my life be marked by significance when I'm gone? Will it matter that I was here? Repeatedly in the book of Ecclesiastes, these questions are asked. Life on this earth alone cannot ultimately satisfy. It is meaningless. Why? Because God has "set eternity in the hearts of men" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). The heart separated from God is eternally restless, empty until it is restored back to Him.

The question is, will those who are searching find God at Village? Too often, when people look to the church for fullness they leave even more empty, finding religion rather than relationship.

When we as a church dream about our future, we envision a church where emptiness connects with fullness, with fulfillment, where our deepest longings for something of the Spirit are found.

What will this require?

- 1) That we intentionally position ourselves to *meet* God. In Scripture, God generally shows up where He is longed for.
- 2) That we intentionally station ourselves to *hear* God.
- 3) That we intentionally position ourselves to *respond* to God – to whatever He says, in whatever manner needed.

Reflection: Am I filled with the fullness of God? Do I position myself to meet God, to hear what He has to say, and to respond to Him?

Prayer: Lord, I don't want an empty life. I want my deepest longings satisfied. Help me to turn my ear to You, to listen and respond in obedience. Holy Spirit, come and fill me up.

Day Four

Principle: Opportunity

Scripture: It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ... Ephesians 4:11-12

Thoughts: We envision Village to be a church where gifts connect with opportunity, as we use our God-given talents to meet needs.

As we at Village dream about our future, we want to be all that God calls us to be, not a wasteland of unrealized potential and unmet needs. We want to be a place where people come and discover what they have been truly made for. After all, that is what God mandates in this text.

God tells us first to realize His grace in our life. God has done something gracious in all of us who know Him, something that goes beyond salvation. When Jesus accomplished His work on the Cross and went to heaven, He dispensed certain abilities to each one of us who make up His body. Some make the faulty assumption that we have nothing to offer, but God says just the opposite. What do you have a passion for that blesses others? What does God seem to bless in your life? These are all indications of your gifts.

All of us are called to unleash His gifts. Gifted leaders must invest in people, equipping them for ministry. Gifted saints must be released into service, to be used by God in ways they never imagined.

We realize and unleash our gifts in order to fulfill God's purpose. If leaders are equipping, if saints are ministering, and if the gifts converge, then something powerful will happen. A radical oneness will emerge, a radical maturity will develop, and a radical fullness will result.

Reflection: Have I discovered the gifts God has given me? How is He calling me to use those gifts?

Prayer: Lord, help me release my God-given potential for the building up of Your people. Open doors before me so that I will clearly know Your leading.

Day Five

Principle: Unity

Scripture: After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.
Revelation 7:9

Thoughts: We envision Village to be a church where cultures connect in unity as all people are included in our family.

When we arrive in Heaven to be with our Lord for eternity, it won't matter what language we spoke, what color our skin was, or even what style of musical worship we preferred. In Heaven there won't be any cultural misunderstandings. We will be together in unity – every tribe, tongue and nation, worshipping God.

While the world today is far from realizing this Heavenly unity, the church can and must be different and point the way toward cultures connecting in unity. How do we do this? We must train our focus on Christ and anchor our faith on the core truths from God's Word. While we must never back away from the core tenets of our faith, we must be willing to allow Christ to be expressed uniquely within each culture. One culture may emphasize relationships above time management; another culture may value tradition over the contemporary. Above all, we must recognize that we all are a work in progress and extend grace one to another, exercising patience as we seek to understand each other and love one another into greater Christ-likeness.

Reflection: Am I extending grace and mercy to my brothers and sisters in the Lord regardless of their culture? Am I open to seeing God express more of Himself through different cultures rather than judge the differences?

Prayer: God, help me to see, even at Village, how You are working through cultures to show Yourself. Help me to know You more as I see You uniquely glorified through every tribe, tongue and nation.

Day Six

Principle: Witness

Scripture: But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.
Acts 1:8

Thoughts: We envision Village to be a church where Christ connects with the world as we spread God's Truth through our words and deeds, person to person.

According to the Joshua Project, of the nearly 16,000 unique people groups in the world's 6.5 billion people, nearly 7,000 people groups remain unreached with no access to the Gospel. God's heart is to see every tribe, tongue and nation reached with the Good News. How will we reach those around the world who are lost? The answer is the church.

While not all of us will be called to the other side of the world, we all play a significant part in reaching the lost. What role must Village play in reaching the lost?

- 1) *Reach out locally:* God often brings the world to us. Watch for God to provide opportunities to share the Good News here in Washington County.
- 2) *Go:* Village sends an average of 100 people each year on short term missions to India, Kazakhstan, Klemtu, and Lebanon. Many Villagers today are heading out for even longer assignments – mid-term and long-term. Listen to see if God is calling you to go..
- 3) *Support:* If you don't go, choose to support those who have gone. Support goes far beyond finances – words of encouragement, prayer, care packages, welcoming them when they're home, or even visiting them overseas. Be generous..
- 4) *Mobilize:* Beyond supporting those working abroad, encourage others in the church to get behind our workers worldwide or even to go themselves.

Reflection: How is God calling me to extend His Gospel to the lost world? How can I be Christ incarnate to those without Hope?

Prayer: God, use me to reach those who have yet to hear Your Word. You have blessed me that I might be a blessing to others. Show me how to share Your heart with the world.

Day Seven

Principle: Vision

Scripture: I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! Revelation 3:15

Thoughts: There's something in all of us that yearns to live life above the plains, at another level. Jesus touched on this in John 10:10 when He said, "I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly."

God also intends an abundant life for the church — to rise above lifelessness and listlessness, above the constraints of conformity and compromise, routine and mediocrity; to rediscover desire.

We've been dreaming together about God's future for Village. If we are without a vision, we are without a future. Scripture is filled with visionaries who caught a glimpse of a future. What did they see? What must we see?

- 1) *See life for what it is.* If we are to be a church that imagines, that envisions a radical future, we too must discern our times, understand our culture, and recognize the mess we are in.
- 2) *See God for who He is.* No matter how great the mess, nothing overwhelms God. God hears our pleas and understands our hearts. His grace, mercy, and faithfulness can more than heal us. Jesus proclaimed that the church would be his ongoing presence in this broken world. As we look to the future, we ask, "God, what would You have us do now?"
- 3) *See His calling for what it is.* If you are a Christ follower, you have been summoned to respond to God's forgiveness and then to uniquely use your gifts to impact this world for Jesus.
- 4) *See cost for what it is.* Visions don't merely happen. They require risk, faith, and commitment. The Bible's visionaries were willing to forego their own status, comfort, and personal egos to serve God. Are we?

Reflection: Village's vision will call for our time and will demand the resources God has given us to manage. Am I willing to sign on?

Prayer: Lord, please give me eyes to see life for what it is and to see You for who You are. Show me Your calling, and give me the strength to remain committed to it despite the cost.

Day Eight

Principle: Joy

Scripture: And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 2 Corinthians 8:1-2

Thoughts: The Macedonians' poverty was due partly to harsh treatment from Roman conquerors. The Romans had exploited the rich natural resources of their land. Also, their poverty was due to a succession of civil wars on their soil before Augustus became emperor.

Out of their poverty they gave to Paul's Jerusalem relief fund, a collection to bring support to the impoverished mother church in Jerusalem. The Macedonians didn't give out of their plenty; they gave out of their poverty. Their joy welled up in rich generosity.

Consider 2 Corinthians 9:7 - Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

God loves it when people make a deliberate and thoughtful decision in their hearts to give. He desires for us to enjoy giving. His will is that we be joyful givers, not people who give because we feel pressured or pushed, but because we have freely made a joyful decision to give.

The Macedonians gave out of joy. Their hearts were so satisfied in the grace of God and so happy in the goodness of God that they were moved to give out of their poverty. This is not a legalistic act. This isn't giving out of pressure or guilt. This is an explosion of grace in the heart that overflows into the lives of others. God desires for us to give out of joy.

Reflection: Have I ever given of my resources with great joy? Why did I enjoy giving so much? What would it take for me to enter into a deeper experience of cheerful giving?

Prayer: Lord, You are a God of joy. You desire cheerful giving. Show me how to joyfully give to Your purposes. Create within me a heart that gives cheerfully. By Your grace, even when finances are tight and resources are shrinking, move my heart to give out of joy.

Day Nine:

Principle: Sacrifice

Scripture: For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. 2 Corinthians 8:3a

Thoughts: They gave as much as they could reasonably and possibly give and then gave some more. Maybe they had a vision of what could be — the poor being fed in Jerusalem and the unity of the church. They gave as much as they could possibly give.

This verse calls to mind the story of the widow’s mite.

”Sitting across from the offering box, he (Jesus) was observing how the crowd tossed money in for the collection. Many of the rich were making large contributions. One poor widow came up and put in two small coins – a measly two cents. Jesus called his disciples over and said, ’The truth is that this poor widow gave more to the collection than all the others put in together. All the others gave what they’ll never miss; she gave extravagantly what she couldn’t afford—she gave her all.’ ” (Mark 12 from *The Message*)

That’s sacrifice! As we bring our vision to action, we are asking for equal sacrifice, not equal giving. The size of the gift is not as important as the size of the sacrifice.

Reflection: What would a sacrifice look like for me? What could I give up in order to give more generously?

Prayer: God of sacrifice, the Macedonians gave more than they were able and the widow gave all she had. Was that wise? Wasn’t that a little reckless? What moved them to give like that? Did You take care of their needs? Guide me into sacrificial giving. Whatever You did in them to move them to give like that, do it in me!

Day Ten

Principle: Willingness

Scripture: Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 2 Corinthians 8:3b–4

Thoughts: You could tell God was at work in the lives of the Macedonians because no one had to coerce them into giving. The opposite is true; they pleaded with Paul for the privilege of sharing with others. That’s evidence of a true work of God. People were eager to give. Consider a similar example when the tabernacle was constructed in Exodus 36:

”Then Moses summoned Bezalel and Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the LORD had given ability and who was willing to come and do the work. They received from Moses all the offerings the Israelites had brought to carry out the work of constructing the sanctuary. And the people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning. So all the skilled craftsmen who were doing all the work on the sanctuary left their work and said to Moses, ’The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the LORD commanded to be done.’

“Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: ’No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.’ And so the people were restrained from bringing more, because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.” (Exodus 36:2-7)

The people were so willing to give that they gave more than enough. Moses actually had to tell them to stop giving.

In Corinthians we read, “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.” (2 Corinthians 9:6)

This is not a promise that if we give generously God will make us rich. But it is saying that if we sow a little into God’s kingdom, we will reap a little. If we sow generously, we will reap a generous amount. The kingdom grows and prospers when we give willingly and generously.

Reflection: What impact is God’s Word having on my willingness to give generously? How are my thoughts on stewardship being transformed?

Prayer: Generous God, free me up to give willingly. Remove from my heart everything that holds me back from giving freely to Your purposes. Reveal to me any places in my heart that are not open to Your work.

Day Eleven

Principle: Surrender

Scripture: And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. 2 Corinthians 8:5

Thoughts: As we consider giving, let's not start with our checkbook or our income or even our budgets. Let's start with our hearts. Before we consider how much of our income we will give away this year, let's start with the question, "How much of myself am I going to give to Christ this year?"

Along with this principle of surrender, we need to remember that we are merely stewards of God's resources. We possess nothing. Everything is God's. He has entrusted us with the management of His possessions. To learn more about stewardship, read Matthew 25:14-30.

Consider I Chronicles 29:14: "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand."

God allows us to give back to Him what is already His. The beginning of the life of stewardship is surrender.

How far will we go to bring Village's vision to action? Will we give God 10%? Will we give Him 25%? Will we give Him 50%? Will we give Him 90%? Or are we going to give 100% of our total selves to God? Before we can give anything financially, we must first give ourselves totally to the Lord.

Reflection: Are my possessions being used to accomplish God's purposes? Do I have anything that is not available to God's use?

Prayer: Lord God, I surrender all to you. Loosen my grip on money and things. All that I am and everything that I have is yours.

Day Twelve

Principle: Follow Through

Scripture: So we urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part. But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us— see that you also excel in this grace of giving. 2 Corinthians 8:6-7

Thoughts: Desiring to give is an act of grace in the heart of an individual. Keeping a commitment to give is simply the completion of an act of grace in our hearts.

Note Paul's words—excel in the grace of giving; raise the bar in giving. That's what we are talking about—going higher in our giving; setting a higher standard in our personal giving and following through on our giving.

That's why it is important to count the cost before we commit to give. Over the coming months and years we will have the opportunity to follow through on our commitment. We must consider very carefully our commitment to the vision of Village. Is our commitment a work of God's grace in our hearts? If it is, that grace will carry the intention into action and completion.

Reflection: In any organization, excellence is measured to a great degree on the ability to follow through on commitments. Do I *excel* in giving?

Prayer: Faithful God, by Your grace raise the level of my giving. I desire to excel in giving. Guard me from making a commitment out of the flesh. Lead me to make a commitment that pleases You and then enable me to follow through on my commitment.

Day Thirteen

Principle: Worship

Scripture: I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. 2 Corinthians 8:8–12

Thoughts: This is one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible. Jesus gave up His own riches so that we could become rich. Shouldn't we give up our riches to meet the needs of others and to enrich them spiritually?

Maybe you are not in a position to give very much, but God doesn't care about the size of your offering. He cares about at the size of your heart.

Again, here we see equal sacrifice, not equal gifts. We should give with the measure of grace that God has given us.

Do not allow yourself to be motivated out of guilt. If you do, it will count for nothing. Grace is God's motivation for giving. Sharing of our resources is simply a way of saying "thank you" to God for the grace we have been shown in Christ. Giving is intimately tied to worship. When we give in response to God's grace, we are lifting up an offering of thanksgiving to God.

Reflection: Am I ever motivated to give out of guilt? Have I ever felt that my gifts to God's purposes were offerings of thanksgiving and worship? Is grace becoming a stronger dynamic in my giving?

Prayer: Gracious God, thank You for the grace that You have given to me in Christ Jesus! In Christ, You have given all spiritual blessings to me. Teach me to give not out of the letter of the Law but out of the Spirit of grace. Guide me and lead me.

Day Fourteen

Principle: Equality

Scripture: Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little." 2 Corinthians 8:13–15

Thoughts: Our giving isn't intended to encourage luxury or laziness on the part of those who receive a gift. In fact, this happened in the New Testament. Some took advantage of the New Testament concept of *koinonia*, the idea that all things are held in common. It's the philosophy that my stuff isn't my own. If you have a need, it's yours. But some took advantage of this philosophy so much so that Paul had to write, "If a person doesn't work, neither should he eat." Again, the principle of equality applies to our giving: equal sacrifice, not equal gifts.

On this last day, ask God to begin helping you set goals for giving. Here is a four-step process to set goals for giving:

- 1) *Spend time with God.* Seek His will and direction. Pray. Spend time in the Bible seeking guidance.
- 2) *Record your impressions.* Write down the direction you are receiving from God and his Word.
- 3) *Make the goal measurable.* Don't say, "I'm going to give more." How much more? When are you going to give? Weekly? Monthly? Bimonthly? What will you give? An amount? A percentage?
- 4) *Take action.* Trust God. Follow through. Keep your commitment.

Reflection: How successful do I want to be in the area of stewardship and giving? What things have challenged and inspired me in these devotional studies?

Prayer: Gracious and generous God, what do You want to do through me to realize Your vision for Village?