

Visioneering

What's in it for me? Learn how a precise vision can steer your life toward God and success.

Living your best life isn't about being the richest, most successful person around. Far from it. It's about living a life with purpose – one that's entwined with God's purpose. And, to do this, you have to have a vision of what you want to achieve in his name. Articulating and realizing a vision can be difficult. It involves drawing others in by understanding yourself and expressing your ideas clearly and powerfully. It requires strength of character to stand up against critics and naysayers. That's where these blinks come in. They explain how to create and nurture a vision so you can live your best life. In these blinks, you'll also learn

why bedtime with your kids might be the most important part of your day; what to do when the critics come calling; and how to sacrifice financially for your cause.

Visioneering is the sum total of inspiration, conviction, action, determination, and completion.

Life is a journey. Yes, you're right – there's nothing earth-shattering about this stale old cliché. But here's a question that might freshen it up a bit: If life is a journey, then what kind of journey is it? Is it an aimless road trip with no real destination – a trip that, though enjoyable at times, leads you nowhere, thanks to poor planning and disorganization? Or is it a different kind of journey – one that leaves room for pleasant detours and sightseeing but still has a set destination? If your life sounds like option two, you might already be a visioneer. The key message here is: Visioneering is the sum total of inspiration, conviction, action, determination, and completion. Visioneering means clearly envisioning your future as it ties to God's plan, and keeping that vision in the foreground as you plan your life. Visioneering brings clarity and purpose to a meandering, chaotic life by bringing four elements to it: passion, motivation, direction, and purpose. How do these values play out in the life of a Christian? Well, we're all a product of Christ's vision – each of us was created to contribute in some unique way to the realization of his vision. We also each come preprogrammed with a vision, unique to us and part of Christ's creative plan. If we can discern that vision, it'll contribute to the completion of Christ's vision. Here's how you can tell a vision from a whim or a fleeting idea: A vision begins with hearing, reading, or seeing something that generates concern. For example, say you read an article about how difficult it is for impoverished children to reach their potential. This may generate within you a deep concern for these children. But is that a vision? After all, the world contains many things to be concerned about: those impoverished children, yes, but also stray cats, deforestation, and the epidemic of loneliness among the elderly. So which one is it? How can you tell which issue will generate your vision? Simply ask yourself which one breaks your heart. A vision that's ordained by God feels like a moral imperative. What's more, it connects to something that's happening in the world right now, with the current generation. When you've honed in on a concern that you simply can't rest without attempting to resolve,

you've identified your inspiration. Once you've done this, wait! Your vision needs to mature before you take action, and God will send you a sign when your vision reaches maturity.

You'll know what you need to do long before you know how to do it.

No matter how slowly things progress, God has a plan for you and he's positioning you to make it happen. Even if things don't immediately go your way when you start to pursue your goal, that doesn't necessarily mean you're not succeeding. Remember: you're not pursuing financial gain or social recognition. Success doesn't mean awards and accolades. It means sticking to the path, pursuing your vision, and persevering even in the face of hardship. If you do that, and you have faith in God's plan, then you've already succeeded. The key message here is: You'll know what you need to do long before you know how to do it. So what does it look like to have faith and pursue your vision, even if you've no idea how you'll get there? Well, let's look at the example of Chris, a student who shared his vision with the author. Chris said that he wanted to share the gospel with every kid at his school, Dunwoody High School. But Chris faced some obstacles; as a skater, he was more alternative than popular, so he didn't have a platform for others to listen to him. He considered writing students letters or calling all of them, but none of the ideas clicked. As the year progressed, Chris continued to pray and trust God while taking advantage of every opportunity to talk to people. One kid who listened to him was Mark. Mark was a troubled student; he'd moved to Atlanta from Miami after his mom kicked him out of the house. He'd been using drugs and alcohol and had flunked out of school. Chris was the only person who befriended Mark, and after an evening spent bonding while listening to music, Chris spoke to Mark about a heavenly father who believed in him. Mark became a Christian, and this sparked a change in his behavior. Some time after Chris graduated and left for college, Mark was chosen to speak to the entire student body at an Arrive Alive event that raised awareness about the dangers of spring break drinking. There, in front of all the students, teachers, and staff, Mark spoke about how Jesus loved him and died on the cross for his sins. His speech was met with a standing ovation. What Chris had envisioned came to be - every student at Dunwoody High School heard the gospel that day. And it all began with Chris talking to Mark. This was the step that needed to happen for God to work through them both.

To lay the groundwork for your vision, begin visioncasting.

You've identified your vision, prayed about it, and have faith in your belief that God will make it happen. You know that God will help you recognize the right time to swing into action. Now it's time to spread the word, to cast your vision into the world and inspire others to commit to your vision. The author calls this visioncasting. As the apostle Paul wrote, words have immense power, and good, wholesome words that clearly express your vision can have a powerful impact. The key message here is: To lay the groundwork for your vision, begin visioncasting. Four things that should always exist in an effective vision are the problem, the solution, the reason for doing something about it, and the reason that something needs to be done immediately. You have to visioncast

your concern to grab others with it. To sell others on your solution, the first and most important thing to have is a clear vision. You have to know your vision well enough to clearly articulate it out loud. You have to believe in the necessity of your vision so much that you can pierce through the hearts of your listeners. If you wonder what difference your plans will make, remember that no matter how small the specific task or vision seems, it's a cog in the huge machine of God's design. When you look at things that way, everything is more than just a small thing. You're not just raising your kids – you're influencing a whole generation. When you see how your vision supports God's plan, you'll feel the urgency to compel others to join you. Visioncasting is powerful. It can start movements or change the course of someone's life. And other people's visions for you can influence the direction of your own life, too, in ways both good and bad. A writer might point to an English teacher telling her that her work was powerful as the exact point where her success began; a shy person may point out that a parent told him he was too loud. The most powerful kind of visioncasting is that done by parents. All over America, bedtime is a prime time for parents to snuggle in with their children and share their vision, their solution, and the way they both connect to God's purpose.

Commit to your vision no matter what challenges you face.

People who visioneer successfully commit to their visions before they have the money, resources, or the things they need to make them happen. But it isn't always easy to stay strong in the face of comments like, "That's unrealistic," or "That's old-fashioned thinking." But when you understand that your vision is an important part of glorifying God, you realize that no obstacles are insurmountable. The key message here is: Commit to your vision no matter what challenges you face. It's a fact of life: to do things, you need money. To save up the money to serve your vision, you have to be prepared to make personal financial sacrifices. After all, if you aren't willing to put 100 percent into your vision, how can you expect others to do so? Money isn't the only hurdle. Another is criticism from those who haven't bought into your vision yet. People will tell you it's too hard or not worth it, or that this isn't the right time for your idea. Some of us believe our critics and give up. We think maybe they're right and we're wasting our time. Others get upset and dump the negativity onto their family and friends. Still others keep their anger all pent up inside. None of these reactions will help you get to your goal. So what will? In a word: prayer. Prayer will remind you how your vision is tied to God's purpose. Now, some critics may have valid concerns. Maybe you don't actually have the experience, money, or skills that you need. But remember: You're not doing this alone. God is doing it through you, and it might be that God's plans call for flexibility and adjustment. For example, suppose your vision is to set up a clinic in another country, but your student loans require that you get a job at the front desk of a clinic at home instead. But maybe the doctor you work for shares your vision, and ten years down the line, suggests you accompany her on a trip to Zimbabwe to – you guessed it – set up a clinic! Be flexible; your plan is just one way of achieving God's vision.

Without unity of purpose, visions can't survive.

Some of the best things in life work out because you've done them with others. Teamwork makes the vision work. You may have cast and planned your vision effectively and got buy-in from others, but it's possible that as time passes, some of your team will lose focus, or crises in their lives might temporarily derail them. If so, it's important to pull everyone back into the force field of your vision as soon as possible. The key message here is: Without unity of purpose, visions can't survive. Your vision may be small - something like raising two children with your spouse - or it may be big - say, building a school from the ground up in a remote area. Whatever it is, its success depends on the commitment of all parties involved, whether it's your spouse or the volunteers in your vision. But a time may come when a family member or coworker has checked out of your vision. There are clues: They may behave in a passive-aggressive way and talk about you rather than to you. They may become negative about others on the team. They may view others' failures as their successes. Maybe they have their own reasons for distrusting your vision, and these reasons may cause them to hinder your plans. Address these behaviors immediately, understanding that leading isn't the same as controlling. Believe everyone is inherently good and speak to them directly, not behind their backs. We all know that influential person who everyone wants to follow because of some inner quality that has nothing to do with money or success. Become that person with an inner conviction that comes from knowing you're executing God's vision. This belief will express itself in moral authority that others will respond to. This type of respect is hard to earn and easy to lose; hold on to it with integrity. Stay firm and rooted; don't take shortcuts. The author remembers a youth pastor who exuded this spirit until a visit to a water play area. When the kids expressed sadness about leaving at closing time, the youth pastor said they could sneak back in after dinner; no one would know. The author never felt the same way about that youth pastor again. Maintaining moral authority in the long haul requires character, sacrifice, and time. One slip and it's gone.

Anything that distracts you from your vision is keeping you from doing God's work.

When the Biblical character Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, Sanballat called him to come down. But Nehemiah responded: "I am doing a great work and I cannot come down." Let that be your motto anytime you contemplate skipping your kids' bedtime to work late or accept that seemingly "innocent" drink invite from a person who isn't your spouse. Whether it's sex, money, or even too many hobbies, any distraction from God's plan is a threat to your vision. The key message here is: Anything that distracts you from your vision is keeping you from doing God's work. When it comes to distractions, there's an unlimited supply to choose from. It's so easy to get derailed. But broadly speaking, there are three categories: opportunities, criticism, and fear. Opportunities may seem like a positive thing, but if they take you away from God's plan, they're the opposite. A new job with a bigger salary may seem like a great opportunity, but if it comes with an expectation that you'll work 60 hours a week, you'll be consumed by that to the exclusion of everything else. Criticism is painful, especially when people don't really understand what you're doing and attribute the wrong motivations to your actions. It's tough to insist on staying in for an evening of thoughtful contemplation and worship when others say things like, "Oh, come on, it's just one night! You've become obsessed with your church!" Fear is an especially easy trap to fall

into. When you act out of fear, you won't make the best decisions. If you choose a spouse based on the fear that no one better will come along, you're not picking your partner for their qualities. If you're too scared that you won't find investors, you may never start that business you've dreamed of. And the biggest fear distraction question of them all: What if I fail? It's important not to fall prey to any of these distractions because your vision is part of divine purpose. Keeping that thought at the forefront can help you overcome fear or criticism and help you rise above them to live a life of vision, one rich in peace, healthy relationships, and character. You don't need to be brave, rich, or talented to live a life dedicated to fulfilling God's purpose. All you need is clarity of vision.

Final summary

The key message in these blinks is that: Because you were made by an endlessly creative God, you must use your talents and strengths to serve your vision, which is entwined with his purpose. Staying focused on your vision gives your life purpose and fulfillment. And here's some more actionable advice: Seek out the advice of an inspirational mentor. Think of at least one person you know who is living a life of clear purpose and direction that's consistent with a godly life. Write down the ways in which you can recognize vision in his actions. Contact this person and make a formal appointment you can discuss the steps he took to translate vision to reality.