

Being a Vision Achiever **Bill Scheidler**

“Any ambition which centers around and terminates upon oneself is unworthy, while an ambition which has the mission of God as its center is not only legitimate but positively praiseworthy.” – Oswald Sanders

I. What are some common characteristics of vision achievers?

Not everyone who receives a vision achieves their vision. Often there are good reasons why one’s vision is never accomplished. It is good to challenge ourselves with some of the characteristics of those who are more likely to achieve vision. This is done not for the purpose of making us feel bad, but for the purpose of taking a look inside of ourselves and making the needed adjustments so that we can indeed become vision achievers.

A. Vision achievers know what their place is and what they are suppose to do (Pro. 27:8).

Like a bird that strays from its nest is a man who strays from his home.

A bird that strays from its nest is a bird “that flies from place to place, whereby she is exposed to all the arts of fowlers, and to birds of prey...So is he who through vanity or lightness changes his abode, or his calling.” –John Wesley’s Explanatory Notes

Earlier we talked about the call from God and how important it is to identify our personal mission. Jesus knew that He was to be about His Father’s business (Luke 2:49). What is the Father’s business for you? What is it that you “must be about?”

“You may get to the very top of the ladder and find it has not been leaning against the right wall.” –A. Raine

The English word business means “pursuit, occupation or calling.”

Knowing the Father’s business for you comes from several things.

1. It comes from knowing the responsibility that has been given to you by God.
2. It comes from understanding the grace that is upon your life.
3. It comes from perceiving your level of faith.
4. It comes from an honest evaluation of your gifting.

Paul gives a great summary of this in Romans 12:1-8.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing

of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. 3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. 4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. 6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Romans 12:1-8, NIV

B. Vision achievers know how to distinguish between fantasy and reality (Heb. 13:9).

While vision achievers are people of faith and visionary in nature, they are also people who have their feet firmly planted on the ground.

1. They are not those who are sucked into every new or novel trend (Eph. 4:14).

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

2. They are not those who are enticed by get-rich-schemes (I Tim. 6:9-10).

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

3. They are those who live by principles and do not compromise their principles for the sake of empty dreams.

C. Vision achievers have the ability to focus (Mt. 6:24; I Cor. 15:58; Jam. 1:6-8).

“You cannot be anything if you want to be everything.” –Solomon Schechter

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Matthew 6:24

Later we will see that the ability to change or adapt is good, but continually changing one's focus it is not a positive trait of vision achievers (Pro. 24:21-22).

My son, fear the LORD and the king; do not associate with those given to change; for their calamity will rise suddenly, and who knows the ruin those two can bring?

This verse is most likely talking about changing your allegiance from the Lord and the king to other leaders in rebellion, but it certainly has relevance when we talk about changing vision often. The more you jump from vision to vision the less likely any of those visions will become a reality.

D. Vision achievers have the ability to discipline themselves to stay on focus (Ps. 90:12).

So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Teach us to make the most of our time, so that we may grow in wisdom. –NLT

“Maturity is revealed by what I do with my free time.” –Bill Gothard

Vision achievers organize all of the areas of their life in such a way that everything is moving in the same direction and contributing to the same purpose. This includes the disciplines of time, money, energy, diet, exercise, recreation and all other aspects of their life.

E. Vision achievers love the idea of a challenge.

Vision achievers are not put off by the fact that something is going to be difficult to accomplish. On the contrary, vision achievers have a “Caleb Spirit” that is actually energized by the challenge. They want the best land, they understand about the giants that inhabit that land, but they are not going to be intimidated.

Then the children of Judah came to Joshua in Gilgal. And Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him: “You know the word which the LORD said to Moses the man of God concerning you and me in Kadesh Barnea. 7 I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh Barnea to spy out the land, and I brought back word to him as it was in my heart. 8 Nevertheless my brethren who went up with me made the heart of the people melt, but I wholly followed the LORD my God. 9 So Moses swore on that day, saying, ‘Surely the land where your foot has trodden shall be your inheritance and your children's forever, because you have wholly followed the LORD my God.’ 10 And now, behold, the LORD has kept me alive, as He said, these forty-five years, ever since the LORD spoke this word to Moses while Israel wandered in the wilderness; and now, here I am this day, eighty-five years old. 11 As yet I am as strong this day as on the day that Moses sent me; just as my strength was then, so now is my strength for war, both for going out and for coming in. 12 Now therefore, give me this mountain of which the LORD spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and that the cities were great and fortified. It may be that the LORD will be with me, and I shall be able to drive them out as the LORD said.” Joshua 14:6-12

Note: Caleb was 85 years old when he made these statements. He was more than 20 years older than anyone else (besides Joshua) going in to possess the land.

F. Vision achievers are constant learners.

Henry Ford once said:

“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young.”

There are many different ways for vision achievers to learn and to keep on learning.

1. They learn from study.

This involves getting into the books and keeping current in the world of learning and technology as it relates to your field of endeavor (I Tim. 2:15; 4:13-16). It may involve seasonal enrollment in courses that will further enhance their levels of competence.

Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you. I Timothy 4:13-16

2. They learn from observation.

This involves learning from others (Heb. 13:7). Others are engaged in pursuits that are similar to yours. A vision achiever is someone who is interested in what others are doing and understands that they do not always need to personally originate everything that they do (reinvent the wheel).

Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Hebrews 13:7

3. They learn from experience.

This involves being careful to learn from and evaluate every experience that we have with the idea of learning something from it. We all have positive and negative experiences. We can learn something from each of them. However, we will only learn from them if we do not try to make excuses for our mistakes, blame others for our mistakes, or insist that we never make mistakes.

4. They learn from correction (Heb. 12:5-11).

This involves being able to receive both positive and negative criticism from others. It involves the ability to receive both encouragement and rebuke. Vision achievers not only receive correction, they invite it and embrace it.

- a. Vision achievers are those who are able to receive criticism without hard feelings (Pro. 27:5-6).

Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. Proverbs 27:5-6

A truly good friend will openly correct you. You can trust a friend who corrects you, but kisses from an enemy are nothing but lies. –CEV

- b. Vision achievers are those who can discuss a point of difference without hostility (Pro. 27:17).

As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.

- c. Vision achievers are those who have the humility to readily admit when they are wrong.

What is said about the Scripture can be applied to many words of correction from others.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. II Timothy 3:16-17

G. Vision achievers are willing to sacrifice present comfort for long-term gain (I Cor. 9:24-25).

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. I Corinthians 9:24-25

These sacrifices may involve limiting one's lifestyle so that resources can be directed toward vision. It may mean paying for a university course instead of a new car. It may involve foregoing entertainment options for the sake of making time for further preparation.

Vision achievers understand the principle of sowing and reaping. There may be a "sowing in tears," but there will eventually be "reaping in joy." They understand that what you reap is directly proportional to what you have sown (II Cor. 9:6).

The early stages of vision development usually require much greater commitment and much deeper sacrifice (starting a church or business).

H. Vision achievers are able to adapt and change.

1. Those who embrace change are those who understand that they cannot anticipate everything from the beginning.

Only God can do this (Is. 46:9-10).

And do not forget the things I have done throughout history. For I am God--I alone! I am God, and there is no one else like me. Only I can tell you what is going to happen even before it happens. Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish. –NLT

Since you do not have God's capability to anticipate the future, if you are going to achieve vision you must be able to adjust what you are doing "on the fly" or while you are going forward. It is just like flying a space craft to the moon (something I do often). At various stages along the way there needs to be small course adjustments.

2. Those who embrace change are those who understand that vision involves a series of progressive revelations (Is. 28:13).

The longer we walk with the Lord the more perfect our understanding of His will and His purposes becomes. We rarely get a full understanding of every aspect of God's vision at the outset. God knows that if He showed us everything at the beginning, it might be more than we could absorb. Often as we go forward God opens further revelation and understanding and with that new doors of opportunity for us to walk through.

3. Those who embrace change are those who can distinguish the means from the end.

- a. The "end" is the ultimate goal or purpose.

- b. The "means" is the vehicle, method or instrument employed to get to that end.

We learned in relation to God's Eternal Purpose that God's instruments may change but His purpose remains the same. This is the same with us in many cases. The flexible part of the vision is the methods or the means and we must be able to be open to creativity in this regard.

4. Those who embrace change are those who are able to re-invent themselves every few years (See the next point).

I. Vision achievers are able to stay relevant to the culture and the times.

To some degree vision achievers must be students of culture. They need to understand the world in which they live. They need to adapt their styles and methods to the characteristics of their target audiences. We cannot ignore the learning styles and the information gathering methods of the present generation. We are all living in a cultural context. We must be able to speak the language of the people that we are trying to reach.

J. Vision achievers have trained their mouths to speak words of faith (Mark 11:23; Pro. 6:2; Rom. 10:8-13).

So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. Mark 11:22-24

Obviously, the ability to speak such words of faith is based on hearing and knowing the things that God has said concerning you and your vision. When we know that we have heard from God, a strong component of the walk of faith is our confession of faith.

You are snared by the words of your mouth; you are taken by the words of your mouth. Proverbs 6:2

K. Vision achievers are able to make bold decisions (I Kgs. 18:21).

And Elijah came to all the people, and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people answered him not a word.

Other translations:

*How long are you going to waver between two opinions? –NLT
How long will you go limping between two sides? –ASV
How much longer will you try to have things both ways? –CEV
How long will you straddle the issue? –NAB
How long are you going to sit on the fence? –Msg*

Vision achievers cannot be indecisive in their decision making process. There is a difference between a bold decision and a "rash" decision. A rash decision is made quickly and emotionally without all of the information needed to make the decision. A bold decision is an informed decision, a difficult decision, a decision with a certain amount of risk that others are hesitant or fearful to make.

“Maturity is the ability to make a decision and stand by it. The immature spend their lives exploring endless possibilities, then do nothing.” –Emerson

L. Vision achievers are able to motivate others to join them in the work.

In other words, vision achievers are team players.

1. They are able to do this because they know that they need others to fulfill their vision.
2. They are able to do this because they realize their personal limitations and that they cannot “do it all.” In other words, they have an honest evaluation of themselves.
3. They are able to do this because they have a high regard for and place a high value on people.
4. They are able to do this because they understand and celebrate diversity within people (not everyone has to be just like them). They staff their weakness.

M. Vision achievers are willing to invest in people.

Vision achievers realize that people are the most valuable asset that they have in accomplishing their vision. They realize that a constant turnover of personnel is not conducive to vision fulfillment. They realize that when you invest in people and families you invoke the blessing of God on your endeavors (Pro. 11:24-25). They understand that many people can find their own vision fulfillment within the context of your vision when the conditions are right.

There is one who scatters, yet increases more; and there is one who withholds more than is right, but it leads to poverty. The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself.

N. Vision achievers draw strength from other vision achievers.

The Bible is clear that we are greatly influenced and affected by the people with whom we fellowship (I Cor. 15:33). It indicates that we are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). The more you associate with people of vision the more visionary you become.

Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.” I Corinthians 15:33

The opposite of this verse is also true, “Good company inspires good character.” So the admonition is to “hang out with good characters.”

O. Vision achievers turn obstacles into opportunities.

Vision achievers have the ability to see the opportunity in every crisis (the silver lining in every cloud). They are optimistic by nature.

| Optimist | Pessimist |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Sees the Silver Lining | Sees the Cloud |
| Sees the Donut | Sees the Holes |
| Glass is Half Full | Glass is Half Empty |
| Sees the Potential | Sees the Problems |
| Anticipates the Best | Believes the Worst |
| Expect Things to Succeed | Expect Things to Fail |
| Laughs to forget | Forgets to laugh |
| Says, “Good morning Lord!” | Says “Good Lord, its morning!” |
| Happy | Depressing |
| Healthy | Unhealthy |

“Both optimists and pessimists contribute to our society. The optimist invents the airplane and the pessimist the parachute.” –Gil Stern

“Pessimists believe that things are generally bad and that they can become even worse. They feel that when bad things happen it’s permanent and that it will always persist and affect their life. The core of a pessimist’s attitude is helplessness and that nothing they do will make a difference, so why even try.

“Optimists believe that the world is a positive place, that setbacks are temporary, that problems are challenges to overcome, and that each individual plays an active part in what happens in his/her life. Optimistic people have fewer infectious diseases, stronger immune systems, overall better health habits, and live longer.”

–Amy Sherman

There are at least six reasons why vision achievers are able to be optimistic and see the opportunities around them. It is not just the “power of positive thinking.”

1. They are able to do this because they believe God is in control of their lives (Rom. 8:28). As a result they do not panic under stress.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

2. They are able to do this because they do not seek to identify who or what to blame for their troubles (others, circumstances, God, Satan, etc.).
3. They are able to do this because they focus on solutions rather than on problems.
4. They are able to do this because they are people of faith who believe nothing that has been birthed in God is impossible (mountains can be moved).

5. They are able to do this because they have a “not-a-problem” and a “can-do” attitude.
6. They are able to do this because they have the ability to adapt and change to new situations. They are flexible not stubborn.

The following is an article that emphasizes the importance of seizing opportunities even when they are packaged as trouble.

Seizing Opportunity by Giovanni Coratolo

Today’s news reporters are littered with depressing stories about the economy: mortgage crisis, gas prices, and foreclosures are increasing while housing values are plummeting.

As a former small business owner of 30 years I often wonder how I would have operated my businesses under the current economic conditions in light of the constant negative drum beats. So I Googled "managing your business in a downturn". What I received was a lot free advice.

Most of the articles the search yielded told me to sharpen my pencil, cut out unnecessary spending, and to make sure you were taking care of your customers. Well the business school I came from taught me to do this during good times or bad. Why must you wait for a business downturn to decide to run your business based on good management?

I was amazed at the majority of the recommendations that suggested that I should look inward in order to survive rather than looking externally for opportunity. In every economy, good or bad, there are going to be winners and losers. I truly believe that the winners will see opportunity where others will sit and wait for the dark clouds to blow over.

Today, I was fortunate to meet with four of our U.S. Chamber members that were selected by the White House to tell their story to President Bush of how they seized the opportunities afforded them by the business provisions of the recently passed economic stimulus package. Do you know the one thing they all have in common? They were optimistic, forward thinkers that have not let the negative news dampen their entrepreneurial energy to capitalize on innovative ways to grow their businesses and make money. Each one of these business owners were bubbling over with enthusiasm and confidence. All of them were telling stories of growing and expanding their businesses and hiring new workers. When I left the room I found myself wondering if they were reading the same newspapers I was.

P. Vision achievers have the patience to wait for the vision to be realized.

We have to go back to Habakkuk's reminder, "For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry" (Hab. 2:2-3).

I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry.

Psalm 40:1

Q. Vision achievers have a sense of accountability to God and others.

Ultimately we will all have to give an account to God for what He has given to us. We are stewards of His gifts and graces (I Pet. 4:10). Vision achievers live their life in an awareness that we belong to the Lord, everything we have comes from God and He expects us to utilize it for His glory.

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. I Peter 4:10

II. What are some of the obstacles to vision that vision achievers overcome?

Note that there are at least eight opponents of faith or vision:

A. The Voice of Satan

Satan will always seek to get us to doubt those things that the Lord has spoken to us. He will always put a question mark on the word of God. When he first approached Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he challenged what God said to them with the statement, "Has God indeed said?" (Gen. 3:1).

When Satan tempted Jesus after His spectacular baptism he challenged what God had spoken over Jesus about His sonship when he said, "If you are the Son of God..." (Mt. 4:3).

It is important for us to understand that Satan is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). We need to treat his voice the same way that Jesus did when He said "Get behind me, Satan!" (Luke 4:8). We can never let the voice of Satan shape our vision.

B. Mental Doubts or Worry

We can have doubts just like Peter when he stepped out of the boat and on to the water. He was fine until he began to doubt that he could really do what he was in fact doing. He looked at the circumstances and began to analyze what he was doing from a natural perspective and he lost faith. He began to doubt that the Word of the Lord could sustain him (Mt. 14:24-32). When we try to figure out everything that God reveals and understand it from a human point of view we open ourselves up to doubt.

But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. 25 Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. 26 And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." 28 And Peter answered Him and said, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water." 29 So He said, "Come." And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. 30 But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, "Lord, save me!" 31 And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

Matthew 14:24-32

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. James 1:5-8

Interesting facts about worry:

- 40% of the things you worry about will never happen.
- 30% of the things you worry about couldn't be changed by all the worrying in the world.
- 12% of your worries are needless worries about your health.
- 10% of your worries are about petty, miscellaneous things.
- 8% of your worries are about real and legitimate concerns. In other words,
- 92% of your worrying is a complete waste of time.

"The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today."

–Franklin Roosevelt

C. Discouragement

When things do not go as planned or they do not happen according to our schedule it is easy to get discouraged.

This is why one of the most often repeated challenges in the Bible is to "be strong and very courageous" (See: Deut. 31:6; Josh. 1:2-9; I Chr. 28:20; II Chr. 15:7).

Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave or forsake you.

Deuteronomy 31:6

Discouragement is the opposite of courage. Courage is the quality of mind that meets

danger or opposition with calmness and firmness. It is the ability to be unshaken in the face of danger.

D. Overwhelming Circumstances

When we face obstacles that seem to be much stronger than we are our faith is challenged just like that of the children of Israel when they faced the Red Sea, the giants in the land or Goliath of Gath. These circumstances can lead us to be fearful or full of fear which is the opposite of faithful or full of faith.

E. Physical Weaknesses or Inadequacies

When we start looking at ourselves and seeing how frail and weak we really are it is easy to lose faith. Just like Moses when he said “Who am I?” or “I am not eloquent” (Ex. 3:11; 4:10). Or when Jeremiah said “I am but a youth” (Jer. 1:6).

F. Lack of Financial Provision and Resources

When we see how much money our vision is going to take and we see how little we really have it is easy to shrink back. The problem is that we forget that God has said that all of the gold is His and all of the silver is His (Hag. 2:8). Compared to God, even the richest man in the world is a poor man.

G. Past Failure and Unforgiveness

Sometimes our past experiences of failure can keep us from pursuing future vision. Moses had to be encouraged by the Lord after apparent failure on his first attempt.

The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the LORD upholds him with His hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. Psalm 37:23-25

For a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity. Proverbs 24:16

Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the LORD will be my light. Micah 7:8, NIV

Ultimately the only failure is to not get up and try again. This is why Paul was so clear about forgetting those things that are behind (Phil. 3:13). This is an important key to vision fulfillment—forgetting and forgiving.

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead...

H. The Opposition of Small Thinkers

Every environment has its share of small thinkers who are ready to burst every bubble of enthusiasm that vision can create.

| Small Thinkers | Big Thinkers |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| See the problems | See the opportunities |
| See the cost | See the reward |
| See the work | See the harvest |
| Ask “Why?” | Ask “Why not?” |

III. How does Paul model the characteristics of a vision achiever?

A. Paul achieved his vision before he died (II Tim. 4:6-8).

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

B. Paul possessed the characteristics of a vision achiever.

1. Paul knew his place and what he was supposed to do.

He knew his gifts, his grace, his calling and his area or sphere of rule (Rom. 12:3; II Cor. 10:12-16).

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. Romans 12:3

Oh, don't worry; I wouldn't dare say that I am as wonderful as these other men who tell you how important they are! But they are only comparing themselves with each other, and measuring themselves by themselves. What foolishness! 13 But we will not boast of authority we do not have. Our goal is to stay within the boundaries of God's plan for us, and this plan includes our working there with you. 14 We are not going too far when we claim authority over you, for we were the first to travel all the way to you with the Good News of Christ. 15 Nor do we claim credit for the work someone else has done. Instead, we hope that your faith will grow and that our work among you will be greatly enlarged. 16 Then we will be able to go and preach the Good News in other places that are far beyond you, where no one else is working. Then there will be no question about being in someone else's territory. II Corinthians 10:12-16, NLT

2. Paul was able to distinguish between fantasy and reality (I Cor. 9:26).

Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.

3. Paul was able to keep a single focus (Phil. 3:13-14).

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

4. Paul was able to discipline himself to stay on focus (I Cor. 9:24-27).

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

5. Paul was able to accept a challenge (Acts 20:24).

And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, 19 serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; 20 how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, 21 testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, 23 except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. 24 But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. Acts 20:18-24

6. Paul was a constant learner (II Tim. 4:13)

He was studying right up to the end.

Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come--and the books, especially the parchments.

7. Paul was able to turn obstacles into opportunities.

- a. Paul had many obstacles to overcome (II Cor. 11:23-28, NLT).

They say they serve Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in jail more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. 24 Five different times the Jews gave me thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. 26 I have traveled many weary miles. I have faced danger from flooded rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the stormy seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be Christians but are not. 27 I have lived with weariness and pain and sleepless nights. Often I have been hungry and thirsty and have gone without food. Often I have shivered with cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. 28 Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of how the churches are getting along.

- b. Paul did not let his circumstances change who he was (Eph. 6:20).

He saw himself as an ambassador; after he was imprisoned he became an “ambassador in chains.”

For Paul, only one thing had changed and that was his imprisonment. He was still an apostle; He was still called by God; He was still a preacher and a teacher; He was still responsible for the churches he had birthed and he was still going to fulfill the original word over his life (Acts 9:15-16).

But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.”

- c. Paul took all that life gave him as coming from the Lord (Eph. 4:1).

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called...

Paul never once referred to himself as a prisoner of Rome; he was a prisoner of the Lord or a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

- d. Paul did not dwell on what he could not do; he focused on what he could do.

Paul was able to do this because he was a man of determination who did not let negative circumstances keep him from fulfilling his assignment from the Lord.

Too often we take negative circumstances as a sign that God does not want us to do something. If the apostles had had this attitude, they never would have accomplished anything worthwhile.

e. Paul turned obstacles into opportunities.

Paul had a way of seeing the opportunity in everything. He was able to do this because he received everything in his life as coming from the Lord. He could do this because he believed in God and he believed that God was in control of his life. Because of this he was able to see God in everything.

Paul knew how to turn obstacles into opportunities.

- In the Philippian jail he ministered in the prison.
- After his arrest in Jerusalem he preached to the mob.
- When he was under arrest in Caesarea he witnessed to governors.
- When he was on the slave ship he ministered to the crew.
- When he was shipwrecked on Malta he ministered to the islanders.
- When he was in Rome he continued his ministry from his hired house.

8. Paul was willing to sacrifice present comfort for the long-term gain.

When Paul finally got to the Antioch church, he arrived at a comfortable place for him to minister as a teacher. But living and dying in Antioch was not his call or his vision. He had to be willing to leave the comfort of the Antioch and go on the road where he would face the challenges referred to earlier.

9. Paul was able to adapt and change.

Paul was a strategic planner. After he returned to Antioch after the first missionary journey, he reengaged in the church for a season. However, he was soon planning for the next move. He decided to go back and visit the places where he had been and launch out into some new territory (Acts 15:36). He had his plan (Acts 16:6-7), but God interrupted that plan and redirected him to Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10).

It is interesting to see here that God directed Paul on the fly. Or we could say that God directed him when the ship was moving.

10. Paul was able to stay relevant to culture and the times (I Cor. 9:19-23).

This means I am not bound to obey people just because they pay me, yet I have become a servant of everyone so that I can bring them to Christ. 20 When I am with the Jews, I become one of them so that I can bring them to Christ. When I am with those who follow the Jewish laws, I do the same, even though I am not subject to the law, so that I can bring them to Christ. 21 When I am with the

Gentiles who do not have the Jewish law, I fit in with them as much as I can. In this way, I gain their confidence and bring them to Christ. But I do not discard the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. 22 When I am with those who are oppressed, I share their oppression so that I might bring them to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone so that I might bring them to Christ. 23 I do all this to spread the Good News, and in doing so I enjoy its blessings.

11. Paul was a man who spoke words of faith (Phil 4:13).

...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ... Philippians 1:6

For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Philippians 1:19-21

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Philippians 4:13

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19

12. Paul was able to make bold decisions (Acts 13:46-49; I Th. 2:2).
13. Paul was a team player who motivated others to join him in the work.
14. Paul was willing to invest in people. Not just people who they perceive they can use for their own ends.
15. Paul drew strength from other vision achievers (Gal. 2:9).
16. Paul had patience to wait for the vision to be realized.

Paul had the vision early, but it took many years for it to come to pass.

17. Paul had lived with a sense of accountability to God (I Cor. 9:16).

For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!