



CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP FOUNDATIONS

Passion Five:

Faith

from grace to sway

THE SEVEN PASSIONS OF BIBLICAL LEADERS



study 1

Introduction to FAITH for Christian influencers

Most books on leadership emphasise the need for those who influence to have vision. This makes sense. It's difficult to lead anywhere if you don't know where you're going. As an old saying points out, "If you aim for nothing, you're certain to hit it." Leaders are called to be visionaries who see the future and lead others to pursue it with them.

Many Christian leadership authors have taken up this call for vision, often basing their argument biblically on the KJV translation of Proverbs 29:18: **"Where there is no vision, the people perish."** It seems that Scripture can't be much clearer than that. However, this verse doesn't really have anything to do with leaders providing vision. A more accurate translation of this verse is, **"Where there is no revelation from God, people cast off restraint."** The focus of this proverb is not the need for leaders to be providing a vision, but for people to know and do what God wants. The need for Christian authors to appeal to a confusing translation of an obscure proverb just shows the lack of emphasis on vision in Scripture. As far as I can see, the Bible doesn't say anything much about the need for leaders to have vision.

I can hear you responding, "What about all the leaders in the Bible who pursued visions? Leaders like Abraham, Moses and David. They all saw a better future and influenced others to pursue this vision with them. Weren't they great visionaries?" Well yes and no. They certainly knew where God was leading them, but I wouldn't call them visionaries in a traditional sense. Let me explain.

Hebrews 11 describes how the godly Old Testament leaders operated. It was not by vision but "by faith." The difference I see between faith and vision is that faith is based on revelation from God whereas vision is a personal picture of the future. Biblical leaders received a direction from God and believed and obeyed (faith). They didn't have to come up with the vision. They didn't have to be futurists. They just had to hear God.

For example, Abraham was called by God to go to Canaan (Heb. 11:8). It was never his idea. He didn't work out where his family would prosper best. He didn't even know where he was going (Heb. 11:8). He listened to what God said and believed and obeyed. Probably Moses had personal

visions of the future when he was a young man growing up in Pharaoh's household, but these were decimated when he took things into his own hands, killed an Egyptian and was forced to bolt. When Moses finally received God's vision at 80, he was actually reluctant to obey, but he finally believed through faith and led Israel out of Egypt (Heb. 11:27).

Biblically, FAITH is the requirement for effective influence, not vision. I see vision as a gift. It's true that many prominent leaders have the gift of vision. One of the most gifted visionaries in Scripture was Solomon. He saw how to make Israel great by establishing numerous political alliances (often sealed by marriage), pursuing local and worldwide trade, and building significant infrastructure. In his early years, he lived by FAITH, hearing and obeying God, but in his later years, he was driven by personal vision not faith, and his vision became his undoing as his wives led him astray spiritually and his building programs imposed heavy burdens on his people.

I'm not saying that vision is wrong. To be able to sense the future and know how to get there is a great gift from God. But the biblical requirement for Christians of influence is FAITH based on God's revelation. We need to be able to hear God and then hold on to his directions and promises. That requires FAITH. Let's explore what this looks like in more detail.

Biblical leaders operated not by vision, but by faith.

What is FAITH?

The Bible gives us a definition of faith in Heb. 11:1: **"Faith means being sure of the things we hope for and knowing that something is real even if we do not see it."** Faith is believing that something is true and holding onto that truth, even when we can't prove it.

The truth in which Christians of influence have faith is truth that is revealed by God. Its core is the gospel of salvation – that through Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension, those who trust in Jesus will be saved from the penalty of their rebellion against God and will be included in God's forever family. Those who have faith in this truth are saved (Acts 16:31).

As Paul writes to the Ephesians:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. (Eph. 2:8-9)

But the FAITH that drives Christian influence goes beyond believing in the truth of Jesus. We find in Hebrews 11 that FAITH involved hearing what God had to say in specific situations and then believing it despite the prevailing circumstances. For example, Abraham had faith in God's promises of family, land and blessing even though physically it all seemed completely impossible (Heb. 11:8-12). The fleeing Israelites had faith that God would get them across the Red Sea on dry land even though the natural chances of this happening appeared to be zero (Heb. 11:29).

So Christian FAITH is hearing from God, believing and trusting his truth/promise, living as though

that truth is certain (even if there is no practical sign of it ever being fulfilled), and working and praying consistently towards the achievement of God's revealed will.

Examples of revelation and FAITH

Let me offer some big picture examples of FAITH in God's revelation before proceeding to the more challenging areas of personally receiving and trusting God's revelation of truth for the future.

1. Faith in the promise of the gospel. The gospel is great news. Jesus' birth shows us that God loves us incredibly because he sent his Son to earth. Jesus' life reveals that God is compassionate and powerful and wants a personal relationship with us. Jesus' death opens the way for us to be reconciled with God and become his adopted children forever. Jesus' resurrection guarantees that nothing can stop God and his plans for us.

So those who follow Jesus have FAITH in the gospel and its promises. We know we have a future with Jesus. We are guaranteed that nothing will ever separate us from God's love. As Paul says:

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things... No, in all these things [trouble, hardship, persecution, poverty, danger] we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:32, 37-39)

What a guarantee! Yes, life is tough. There are plenty of difficulties and disappointments. But beyond all this lies a cast-iron guarantee. We are safe forever in God's care. We will share eternity with our Father who loves us deeply. The gospel promises that we are secure forever. What a hope. As Christians of influence, we are not stopped by discouragement or persecution, because we know that in the end things are going to work out God's way. We have a much better future with God eternally and we hold on to this (FAITH) for ourselves and for those we influence. The gospel and its guarantees drive our influence.

2. Faith in the growth of God's kingdom. God's promises are not just for individual Christians. Paul says that the whole of creation is groaning like a woman about to give birth (Rom. 8:22). God will not only save people but the whole created order. Jesus asked us to pray that his kingdom would come (Matt. 6:10) - that his rule would be established over everything. This kingdom is already here, is growing, and one day will be completely established with God's intervention and the renewal of the whole of creation (Rev. 21:1-5). **Then Jesus will reign over all.**

In Mark 4, Jesus tells three stories that compare his kingdom with farming. His message in each of these stories is that the kingdom is growing and nothing can stop it. God's kingdom rule is on the move. While Satan fights a constant rear-guard action, nothing can hold back God's kingdom. It doesn't always look like this to us, but the truth is that God is surely and steadily bringing everything together under his control. He is winning and he will win. We have FAITH in this.

Sometimes we feel that we are achieving very little. But actually, everything we do that honours God, no matter how seemingly insignificant, is part of God building his kingdom.

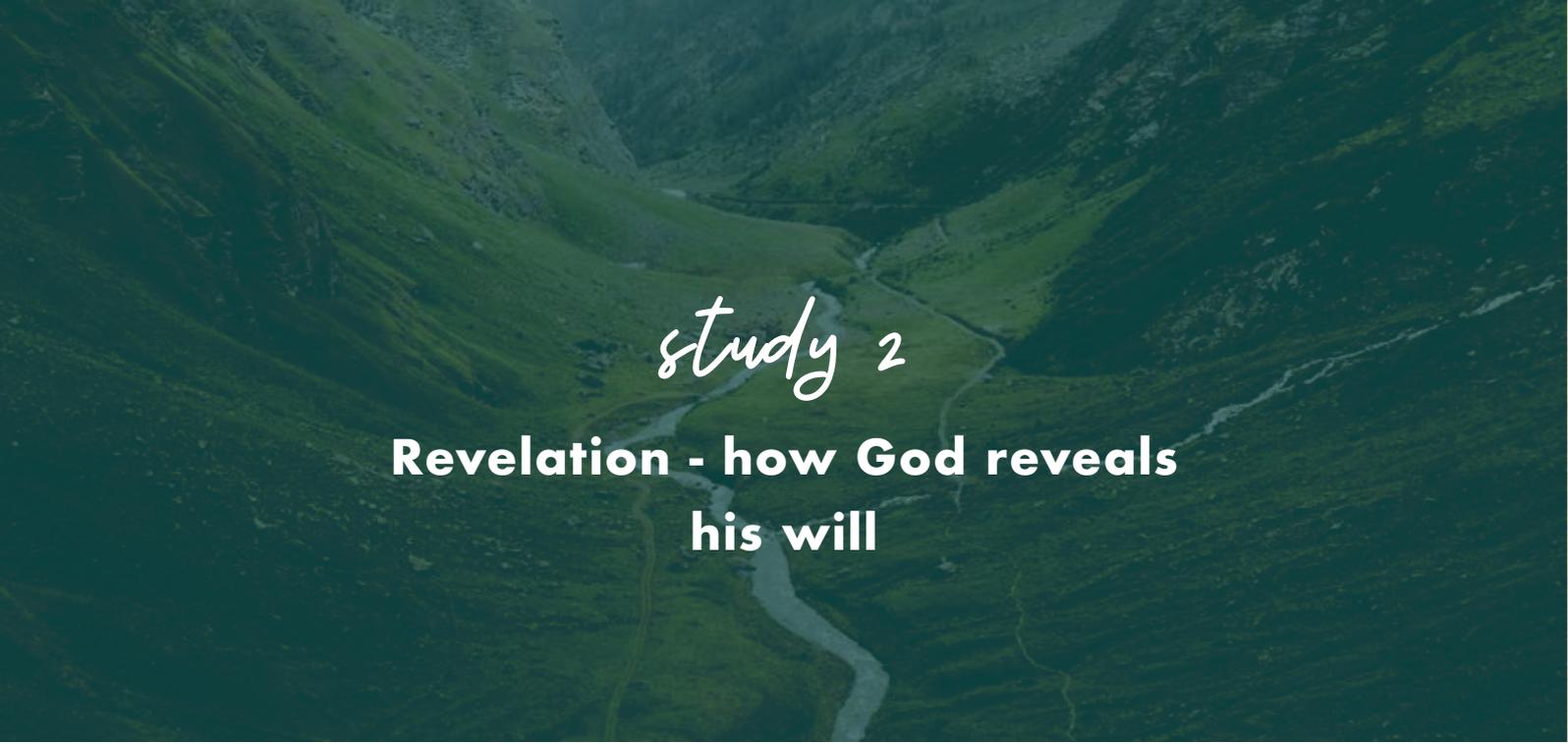
This makes all we do significant. Because God's kingdom includes everything that pleases God, all we do that is right with God contributes to his kingdom. We're not only seeking to share the gospel but also to live and influence righteously and justly so that we contribute to God's growing kingdom.

Sometimes we feel that we are achieving very little. But actually, everything we do that honours God, no matter how seemingly insignificant, is part of God building his kingdom and therefore will count forever. It is all significant. And one day, God will rule over everything. Because of God's revelation, we have faith in God's growing kingdom.

So FAITH is an essential passion for every Christian. As Paul says, **"Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For we live by faith, not by sight"** (1 Cor. 5:6-7). FAITH is particularly important for Christians of influence. We hold on to the promises of God and help those we influence to pursue them in FAITH. God's promises give us direction and confidence.

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 5.1

1. What is the difference between vision and faith?
2. Do you have any biblical promises (general or personal) that you are holding onto strongly in faith?



study 2

Revelation - how God reveals his will

Real FAITH is always preceded by God's revelation. Unless God reveals his will, there can be no FAITH, just wishful thinking. It is important for Christians of influence to understand how God speaks and how we can know what he is saying.

So far in this chapter, the revelation we have considered all comes from the Bible. But once we get beyond the broad revelation of Scripture that is true for every Christian, it becomes more difficult and controversial to know what constitutes God's revelation. There are serious questions to answer. Does God speak to us personally about the future? Can we be sure about what God is going to do through our lives or through our influence? Can we have FAITH in anything beyond what the Scriptures say within the contexts in which they are written?

We need to explore how God reveals himself to humans before we can answer these questions. So let's explore the theology of God's revelation.

Generally, it is accepted that God reveals himself in two ways: through general revelation and special revelation. Special revelation can be divided into two categories – biblical revelation and direct revelation. This then leaves us with three categories of revelation that I define as:

- **General revelation** is what God reveals about himself and his will through natural means. It comes through observation of nature, reflection on history, reasoning, personal conscience, research, wisdom of others, etc.
- **Biblical revelation** (a form of Special Revelation) is what God reveals about himself and his will through his special authoritative revelation in Scripture understood in its context.
- **Direct revelation** (a form of Special Revelation) is what God reveals about himself and his will through his personal speaking through his Spirit. This could be through prophecy, visions, dreams, inspiration, enlivening of a biblical passage, miracles, words of knowledge, experiences, convictions, etc.

First, we need to check whether these three forms of God's revelation are supported biblically. Here are some examples of God revealing himself in these three ways in Scripture.

1. General revelation. Many of the proverbs in Scripture are examples of general revelation. They are aspects of God's truth revealed through reflection and research on life and its consequences. I know that because they are in Scripture, they are also breathed out by the Holy Spirit, but the original principles came from a wise person making observations on life.

You can see that the following proverbs (selected from Prov. 15:1-14) emerged from general revelation. Anyone who wisely observed the way God works through life would come to the same conclusions as the author:

- **A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.**
- **The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.**
- **The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.**
- **A fool spurns a parent's discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence.**
- **The lips of the wise spread knowledge, but the hearts of fools are not upright.**
- **Mockers resent correction, so they avoid the wise.**
- **A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit.**
- **The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly.**

2. Biblical revelation. Scripture itself is biblical revelation but let me offer an example of how a New Testament author drew on Old Testament Scripture to give credence to the point he was making. In other words, the readers and listeners could be sure his theology was absolutely true because God had already revealed this truth through Scripture (biblical revelation).

Here is his theological statement (Heb. 1:3-4):

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

And here is his justification (Heb. 1:5-9). [I have added the references from the Old Testament.]

For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father" [Psa. 2:7]? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son" [2 Sam. 7:14]?

And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." [Deut. 32:43]

In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels spirits, and his servants flames of fire." [Psa. 104:4]

But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a sceptre of justice will be the sceptre of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy." [Psa. 45:6-7]

The author of Hebrews vindicates the truth of his theology by appealing to the Scriptures as his source of authority. What he says is guaranteed truth because it has already been revealed by God in Scripture.

3. Direct revelation. There are numerous examples in Scripture of God speaking directly to people and revealing his truth to them. Let me just offer four examples in which God used different methods to communicate his truth.

a. God speaking directly through the Holy Spirit:

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. (Luke 2:25)

b. God speaking through a prophet:

One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) (Acts 11:28)

c. God speaking through a vision:

One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God. (Acts 18:9-11)

d. God speaking through the community:

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:2-3)

We see God used all three methods of revelation for communicating his truth – truth that can be trusted, truth that should lead to FAITH. These truths included general principles of living life, specific facts about the gospel, explicit information about events that were to occur, and particular details about actions that needed to be taken.

But does God continue to use all three methods of revelation? Some would argue that now we have the full canon of Scripture, general revelation is unnecessary (because it is less reliable than biblical revelation) and God no longer uses direct revelation (because Scripture is all we need to find God's truth).

Scripture is our final authority on revelation from God.

There is some truth to these arguments. Certainly, Scripture is much more reliable and trustworthy than other forms of revelation and therefore we need to check any perceived revelation from God against Scripture. There is not a level playing field between the three forms of revelation. If any supposed revelation contradicts the Bible, then it is not from God. Scripture is our final authority.

But there are many truths from God revealed through general and direct revelation that the Scriptures do not directly address. In Scripture, you won't find research on the impact of pornography on pre-teens or individual direction as to who you should marry. However, God is actually concerned about

these things and often wants us to know his truth. As he did in biblical times, God can use both general revelation and direct revelation (as well as biblical revelation) to show us his will.

Let me make one further observation on biblical revelation. Some of what is claimed as biblical revelation is actually direct revelation. When we find personal meaning or direction in a verse, it is most likely that the Spirit has enlivened that verse and given it a meaning beyond what the author originally intended. There is nothing wrong with seeing this as God's revelation, but we must remember that although this revelation comes from the Bible, it is still direct not biblical revelation, and therefore doesn't have the same absolute authority as Scripture understood in its context.

Personal examples

This has all been rather theoretical so far. Let me give you a few personal examples of how God has shown me his will in different ways in specific situations.

1. General revelation. Malyon Theological College (where I was Principal) had a Council that governed all its ministry. This Council had 12 members and met four times a year. It functioned very effectively in providing guidance and accountability for me as the Principal. It stuck to governance issues and allowed me to lead the College through the faculty and staff.

As Malyon grew, I became aware of the lack of support I felt in the nexus between governance and operations. There were important concerns that the Council did not have the time to discuss but that were not faculty responsibilities; concerns that I bore alone.

I was reading a book on management (it happened to be a Christian book but it could have been secular) that showed from research that the size of groups drastically impacts what they can do well. It indicated that groups of 12 or more could deal with broad policy issues, but open, honest grappling with matters generally required a group of 7 or less. This was general revelation – God's principles coming through research on the way his world works. Through this book, God showed me that I needed a smaller subgroup of the Council to share the processing of key issues. I was confident it was God's idea. So I pursued the vision of a Council Executive and after two years it was implemented by the Council. It made a huge difference to the functioning of Malyon and to my leadership.

2. Biblical revelation. I have always been deeply interested in leadership. My doctoral research was on the development of leaders through mentoring. But my question has always been, "What kind of leaders does God want?" Finding an answer to this question became even more acute when I became Principal of Malyon. As I shared in the introduction of this course, I needed to know what sort of Christian leaders God wanted us to develop.

This started an intense study of Scripture to discern God's passions for leaders in his kingdom. I was hugely impacted by Jeremiah 3:15, "Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart who will lead you with knowledge and understanding." But the search was much bigger than just finding one verse. The result of my search is the biblical vision I am sharing in this course.

I am fully convinced that God has given me this picture of Christian leadership through a thorough study of Scripture in its context. This vision of the kind of leaders God wants to develop did not come from ideas on successful leadership or through some direct leading of the Holy Spirit. It is solidly based in Scripture. It is God's revelation.

3. Direct revelation. I seem to get most of my direct revelation from God when I'm walking. He speaks to my mind when I'm thinking about issues. Of course, you have to be careful about putting God's stamp on ideas that have occurred to you. I have found that God's revelation usually comes with a greater sense of authority, but I'm still cautious before I say that this is from God. I pursue it as being from God, but recognise that the final sign that it is God's revelation/vision will be in its fulfilment.

I was walking one day, thinking about how Malyon could have an influence beyond our students, particularly in the area of leadership, and God said, "Start a Centre of Leadership." Possibly someone had said something about centres to me the week before, but this really seemed to come out of the blue. By the time I finished my walk, I had a clear picture of what I believed God wanted us to do. This vision did not come from Scripture (although it certainly was in line with biblical principles) and it did not come from studying centres in other tertiary institutions (although it could easily have come from general revelation). It was a direct word from God.

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 5.2

Think of a time when you felt clearly led by God. Did God's revelation come through general revelation, biblical revelation or direct revelation? Or a combination of these?

study 3

Advice on revelation and FAITH

Knowing and pursuing what God wants is the emphasis of FAITH. **Christian influence is not fundamentally about having a vision, it's about receiving God's revelation and then having FAITH.** It doesn't require us to think up good ideas about the future. It calls for a desire to seek God, accept his revelation (mostly through Scripture, but also through general and direct revelation), and then hold on to what God says, pursuing it in FAITH until God fulfils his promises.

Of course, there will be Christians of influence who have great ideas and visions for the future. The ability to see and pursue a better future is a really helpful gift that God gives some leaders and he will use this gift as they influence others. But it's not a biblical passion. If vision is not your gift, that's okay. You just need to listen to God and pursue his plans with FAITH.

This all sounds simple. A Christian of influence receives God's revelation and then has total FAITH in what God has said until it is fulfilled. But in reality, once we get beyond basic biblical concepts, knowing what God wants for the future can be quite challenging, especially in a culture that emphasises thinking and doing over listening and waiting. Here are a few words of wisdom.

First, sometimes it's difficult to distinguish clearly between human vision (our pictures of the future) and divine revelation (God's truth about the future). As we influence others, we will frequently ask the question, "Is this my idea or is it God's?" On small, short-term issues, it may not matter much, as long as the vision/direction aligns with Scripture. If we put our heart into it and it succeeds, great, and if it doesn't, then it probably wasn't from God.

If vision is not your gift, that's okay. You just need to listen to God and pursue his plans with FAITH.

But when it comes to vision that requires major decisions or big risks or substantial use of resources or calls that will involve a lot of people, then knowing that we have a FAITH vision from God makes a big difference, because significant FAITH is going to need to be exercised. It is very sad and costly

when people make great sacrifices and invest huge resources to pursue a human vision believing that it's from God. Paul makes this point when it comes to God's revelation about the resurrection. He says that if resurrection turns out to be a good human idea that is not actually true, then God's people are to be pitied.

For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Cor. 15:16-19)

Many of the big, costly personal calls from God will be reinforced by direct revelation.

Second, there is an overlap between general, biblical and direct revelation. For example, as I explained above, I really believe that my ideas on leadership are driven by Scripture (biblical revelation), but many of them are also in keeping with my experience and the research of other practitioners (general revelation), and certain Scriptures (like Jer. 3:15) have been enlivened by God's Spirit and have taken on an importance to

me beyond what Scripture demands (direct revelation). Because God often reinforces his revelation to us, it is likely that he will use different and overlapping ways to do this.

However, let me emphasise once again that biblical revelation always takes precedence over other forms of revelation. We need to constantly check that our hopes and dreams and plans are consistent with biblical revelation. As Paul reminds Timothy,

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Third, while Scripture is pre-eminent, many of the big, costly personal calls from God will be reinforced by direct revelation because they are going to require great FAITH. God wants you to know clearly that he is calling you forward.

Advice on seeking God's FAITH vision

Finding God's direction is a lifelong journey. We are all constantly seeking God and his will. No-one has a shortcut to finding God's personal FAITH visions. But here are a few guidelines that may be of help.

Through general revelation:

- **Consult.** We often find out what God wants when we pool our thoughts. Wisdom grows as we reflect together. Listen to what others are saying, reflect with mentors, and pass your ideas past teammates.
- **Be wise.** Don't be rash. Do your research, think through ramifications, toss around options, and weigh up possibilities.

God often speaks when we are honouring him and showing our desire for him to be first in our lives

- **Search for information.** Read widely and attend conferences where you will be forced to reflect and confront new ways of thinking. Consult both secular and Christian sources. Keep learning and growing.
- **Network.** Build ongoing relationships with those who are further down the track than you. Look for those who can challenge and advise you.
- **Study.** Formal study is sometimes better than conference attendance because it pushes you to deliberate at a deeper level. This often brings new insights.
- **Look for what God is doing.** God is already at work so check out what he is doing and get on board. You don't have to develop everything from scratch.

Through biblical revelation:

- **Systematically read Scripture.** The more you are familiar with the whole of the Bible, the more likely you will be to know what God wants.
- **Study Scripture at depth.** Find out as much as you can about what the Bible says. The more accurate your understanding of a particular passage, the more likely you are to correctly discern what God is saying through it.
- **Reflect theologically.** Keep bringing together your thinking and Scripture. Ask yourself how Scripture relates to the issues you are facing and the actions you are taking.
- **Write down significant verses.** Keep a record of what God is saying to you through his word so that you can go back to it and reflect on it. Memorise key passages if possible.
- **Listen to preaching that reveals biblical truth.** Find preachers/teachers and podcasters who accurately exposit Scripture and make it relevant for life.
- **Look for good biblical/theological teaching and learn from it.**

Through direct revelation:

- **Be cautious.** There are significant challenges in getting direct revelation right. Don't be in a hurry to say, "God has told me to do this." Generally, it's better to say, "I feel God may be leading in this direction."
- **Ask God with a genuine and humble heart.** James says, "You do not have because you do not ask God. When you do ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (Jam. 4:2-3).
- **Worship, fast, pray and listen corporately.** God often speaks when we are honouring him and showing our desire for him to be first in our lives, especially when we are doing this in community. For example, in Acts 13:2 it says, "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'"

- **Read Scripture and write down Holy Spirit enlivened words.** In direct revelation, these words do not necessarily have to be in context or related completely to the message of the passage.
- **Wait in the places where you are most receptive to the Holy Spirit's voice.** There are sometimes places where we are more likely to hear God. For me, it's when I'm walking, thinking and praying. Make sure that you spend time in these places.
- **Carefully weigh up prophetic words.** While prophetic words can be wide of the mark, some are spot on. You don't want to miss God's direct revelation when he speaks to you through prophecy just because there are some prophetic charlatans.
- **Expect confirmation on big calls.** If God is asking you to pursue a costly call, he will usually reinforce his revelation in a number of ways.
- **Check out any significant directions with wise mentors.** Because it's so easy to get direct revelation wrong, it's good to check it out with those with a wisdom gift, just to be safe.

We've spent a lot of space looking at how we can find what God wants. This emphasis is necessary because it's impossible to have FAITH, if you don't know what God is expecting or promising. The Bible tells us a huge amount about God and his promises, so of course we can have FAITH in this clear revelation. But, we have been focusing on how we can know what God is calling us to pursue personally or with others we influence, hence the importance of knowing God's personal FAITH vision.

Revelation and Prayer

You will notice how each of the passions of Christian influence drive us to a life of prayer. Because of GRACE, we pray for God's help because this is his work not ours. We cannot influence by ourselves. We desperately need his empowerment. We also continually pray for the strength to really LOVE people as God loves. A HEART for God grows through intimacy with him and this is forged in prayer. We saw that CROP comes through remaining in the vine (John 15) and this is impossible without prayer. Biblical Christian influence is necessarily saturated with prayer.

No wonder Paul emphasises prayer so strongly in his writings. Here are some of the things he says:

- **And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.** (Eph. 6:18)
- **Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.** (Phil. 4:6)
- **Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.** (Col. 4:2)
- **Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.** (1 Thess. 5:16-18)

There is a strong prayer component in FAITH. If we are to find what God wants, we need to ask him.

So it comes as no surprise that there is a strong prayer component in FAITH. If we are to find what God wants, we need to ask him. Not just once or occasionally, but continually. We persistently seek God until he makes his direction clear. As we have seen this is not the only purpose of prayer, but it is a vital component. Finding God's direction on major issues of influence usually requires significant periods of prayer. There is no shortcut.

It would be so easy if we had a urim and thummin (the stones the Old Testament high priest used to discern the will of God for his people). Popping your hand in a pocket and pulling out God's will would be so straightforward. Of course, we do have Scripture, which is a huge help for us in knowing God and his ways of operating, but God's specific guidance for Christians of influence and their ministries is often found through a deep seeking of him in prayer.

We pray personally; we pray corporately; we pray sacrificially (sometimes with fasting); we pray incessantly. We pray until peace comes and we believe we have found what God is saying, no matter how costly and/or energising this may be. For example, just hours before his crucifixion, Jesus was still confirming with his Father through prayer that the horror of the cross really was the Father's will for him (Matt. 26:36-42). He needed to be sure about such a dreadfully costly call.

**We pray until peace comes
and we believe we have
found what God is saying.**

Sometimes we pray but we don't get clear revelation from God. This may mean that we have to wait. Most leaders are keen to move on decisions, but God has all the time in the world (2 Pet. 3:8). Try not to hurry major decisions about direction. Leaders can do significant harm by moving too quickly. It's healthy for us to learn to wait on God for his time. Be patient.

But on other occasions decisions need to be made. In these cases, I use wisdom (mine and the wisdom of others), and humbly pray that if we have got it wrong, God will intervene. I firmly believe that God is for me and if my motives are right, then he will guide me.

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 5.3

1. What are you seeking God's will for at the moment? It could be something to do with your ministry or your personal life or your work life. How are you going about finding what God wants? Which parts of today's reading apply to this search for God's revelation?

study 4

FAITH visions

As we have seen, faith is “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1). In Scripture, the “what we hope for and what we do not see” mostly refers to God’s person and the work of Christ which brings our eternal salvation. But as Hebrews 11 points out, it can also refer to personal revelations from God. For example, Abraham’s “what we do not see” was God’s promise of a new land (Heb. 11:8-10) and God’s revelation that he would have a child (Heb. 11:11-12). So while our faith is most commonly linked with our salvation, it is also important

for us to have faith in the FAITH visions we receive from God.

A significant revelation from God becomes a compelling glimpse of God’s future that grips our heart and then the hearts of those we influence.

A significant revelation from God becomes a compelling glimpse of God’s future that grips our heart and then the hearts of those we influence. It requires God’s power to implement and constantly drives us back to God in prayer, because without his work the FAITH vision cannot be achieved.

FAITH then sounds like a relatively easy passion to practise once we have God’s revelation. We just trust him. But of course, it’s not easy. There will be many tests of our FAITH. I will list a few of them, illustrating from the life of Abraham:

1. Costs. Very few FAITH visions are fulfilled easily. The path towards God’s fulfilment is lined with problems and struggles and setbacks and costs. When Abraham set out from Ur to travel to the land God had promised (Gen. 11:31), he was risking everything. He left his wider family, his culture, his religion, his security and his lifestyle to travel to the other, unknown side of the world of his day. The cost of FAITH was huge for Abraham and his immediate family.

2. Waiting. Mostly, pursuing FAITH visions includes significant times of waiting when nothing seems to be happening. This can be very frustrating and discouraging. It feels like you are going nowhere. You wonder whether you heard God’s revelation correctly. Abraham and his little family

made it to Haran, and there they stopped (Gen. 11:31). We're not sure exactly why they settled there. Probably it had something to do with Abraham's dad, because as soon as he died they were off (Gen. 11:32). Whatever the reason, it must have been hugely frustrating for Abraham who knew that God's promised land still lay to the south. But he could do nothing but wait. For years.

3. Discouragements. Then there are the times when it feels that you're making significant progress towards your FAITH vision and something happens that causes you to go backwards. It can feel like you're further away than you were at the start. Things get worse rather than better. It is so easy to despair when this happens. Finally, Abraham arrived in God's promised land. You can imagine his excitement over the achievement of this element of his FAITH vision. God's promise had been fulfilled. He surveyed the land and celebrated by building an altar to God (Gen. 12:5-8). Home at last. Then the land was hit with a severe famine (Gen. 12:10) so he had to move on to Egypt. What? He was going backwards.

4. Opposition. It would be encouraging if everyone supported your FAITH vision, but this is seldom the case. Some people lack faith, some hate change, some have other agendas, and others refuse to be led anywhere. The bigger the FAITH vision God gives you, the stronger the opposition will be. Sometimes the opposition is from without, but usually it's from within. It really hurts when those you share life with reject your influence and oppose your FAITH vision. For Abraham, the strongest opposition to his FAITH vision came from within his family. His wife Sarah gave up on God's promise of a child and insisted that Abraham (at 85) sleep with her servant (Gen. 16:1-4) to produce the promised offspring. She successfully opposed and undermined Abraham's FAITH.

5. Failure. Our FAITH is sometimes challenged by our own brokenness and failure. We make poor choices, we disappoint others, we break promises, we behave badly, we fail morally. You know what it's like. We're pursuing with passion this brilliant promise from God when we come face to face with our weakness and stupidity. It seems impossible that God would use someone like us to achieve his purposes. We've blown it. Abraham, the man of

Our faith is sometimes challenged by our own brokenness and failure.

faith, is such an encouragement here. Twice he tried to palm Sarah off as his sister when he was threatened (Gen. 12:12-13; 20:2). Then there was his massive failure leading to the birth of Ishmael and the ensuing family chaos (Gen. 16). He could easily have given up in self-disgust. Yet all God's promises through Abraham were completely fulfilled. We have a merciful God.

6. Impossibilities. As we pursue God's FAITH vision, there will come times when its fulfilment appears impossible. There is just no way forward. The vision seems like "pie in the sky." At these times, it is easy to lose FAITH because there is no human hope that it will ever happen. God's promise about the birth of a son may have seemed plausible to Abraham when he first received it, but as he and Sarah grew older it became more and more impossible. The progression of time took them further away from any chance of having a child. A couple in their nineties just don't conceive. Old Abraham thought it was completely impossible.

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but they need to be able to hear God's voice and to
courageously step out in FAITH even when the circumstances
aren't supportive.**

These are just some of the challenges to FAITH. Your FAITH visions will be tested and it will take courage to continue to believe through it all. That's why we need Jesus whose walk of FAITH on earth required constant courage against all odds. I love how the Jewish leaders noted the courage of Peter and John and immediately traced it back to Jesus:

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13)

Christians of influence may or may not be visionaries, but they need to be able to hear God's voice and to courageously step out in FAITH even when the circumstances aren't supportive. They need to be able to hold onto God's FAITH vision despite the opposition and disappointments. Mostly this involves small steps of FAITH taking us outside our comfort zone, but sometimes God will ask for huge leaps of FAITH that really stretch and test our courage.

God's challenging and encouraging words to Joshua, as he stood on the edge of the fulfilment of his FAITH vision, apply to all Christians of influence who step out in FAITH:

Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. (Josh. 1:6-9)

Sharing God's revelation

As Christians of influence, our revelation from God is not just for us, but is also for those we are working with and influencing. We want them to see that God has plans for us together. An important aspect of our influence will be our sharing God's revelation with others and encouraging FAITH in them.

I mentioned above that sometimes it is difficult to know whether our thoughts about the future are personal visions or God's revelation. As long as we are really seeking God, staying true to Scripture and bathing our effort in prayer, this may not matter much on smaller issues, as long as we don't

make claims for divine inspiration that are not correct. Here are some ways you can phrase vision if you are not absolutely sure it is coming from God:

- "I think God is telling us to ..."
- "I have been praying about this and I have felt in my spirit that God is asking us to ..."
- "God's word tells us to ..., so I think that we should ..."
- "God is working like ... in other places and I believe that we should have a go at this ourselves."
- "Kass has suggested that we ... Through praying about this, I believe that she is right."

Examples of FAITH visions

So what does this look like in practice? Here are some examples of FAITH visions. These are not visions for a church or major organisation, but smaller visions that God may give a Christian of influence for a church ministry or a group of Christian friends or a workplace.

- I think God wants the three of us to get together each week and hold each other accountable for a God-pleasing life so that our character grows.
- I believe that God wants our small group to focus more on encouraging and supporting outreach. So from now on, I would like to suggest that we spend 10 minutes each night praying for our non-Christian friends.
- I sense that we may be spending too much time entertaining the kids at youth group. While it's important that they have a good time, I have a vision to see the kids really grow spiritually this year. How can we make this happen?
- Our church is focusing on worship this year. I envision a type of corporate worship that is not just about singing. God is growing in me a heart to explore ways of worship that don't depend on music. Could you put aside an hour every month to join me in this quest?
- It seems to me that God is calling us to become a young adult work based around effective small groups. We just have to find the leaders and then resource and encourage them.
- I read right through the New Testament last year. I feel that God is leading me to ask you to join me next year in doing the same thing so that we can talk together about what we are learning and be more biblical people. What do you think?
- I think that God is calling me to help grow a compassionate heart for the broken in our community. I would like to develop a team to do random acts of kindness in our community on a monthly basis. Will you join me?
- I believe that Christians at my workplace can have a greater positive impact. I will ask other Christians I know to join me in prayer and fasting each week to pray for our workplace and colleagues.
- I have recently visited children in an orphanage in Thailand and I sense that God is asking me to raise up a team to pray and support these kids and maybe to visit them on a regular basis.
- God has given me a great concern for Muslim refugees. I am finding that many of them are open to the gospel as they have relocated to Australia. I am visiting a group of refugees every week but I need prayer support as I head into the enemy's territory.

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 5.4

1. What is a Faith vision?
2. Do you have any FAITH visions for yourself or your ministry or your influence? Please try to write out one of your FAITH vision.



study 5

The impact of FAITH

Communicating vision/revelation

It's important to have FAITH visions, but to be a Christian of influence, you also need to be able to effectively communicate this vision/revelation with those you are seeking to influence so that it inspires FAITH in them. While leaders with different personalities will do this in different ways, here are a few ideas to get you started.

1. Get as clear a picture as possible of what you believe God wants. The clearer it is to you the better you will be able to communicate it to others. Picture what this will look like when it is achieved.

2. Pray about it personally and have FAITH in God to do it. If you don't have faith that God wants to do this, then others will be even more unsure. Let the passion of God rise in you through prayer and contemplation.

3. Share God's FAITH vision one-on-one with group members. If you are part of a larger group (e.g. youth group leaders), sometimes it's a good idea to share your FAITH vision with group members individually before you present it to the whole group. This will help you gauge the response as well as build momentum.

4. Tell stories that reinforce God's vision. The story may be about how God showed you the vision or it could be a story about how this vision has been implemented in another context. It could also be a story about some movement that you have already seen towards this vision. True stories are very powerful.

5. Repeat the vision consistently in a range of situations. Don't think that people will grasp the vision immediately. Some people will need to hear it many times before they get on board. Keep repeating it until people are really buying in.

6. Get people to seek God together about the vision. If this revelation really is from God, then it will be reinforced as you pray together. Prayer gives God a chance to speak to everyone.

7. Listen for others sharing the vision and reinforce what they say. As people start to grasp the vision and buy into it, they will begin to feel that it is their own vision. This is exciting. When you hear others sharing your vision as their own, don't correct them but encourage them.

8. Recognize and celebrate movement towards God's vision. A revelation from God may take a long time to achieve, but often there will be earlier indications that God is changing things. Look for these small movements and celebrate them.

How FAITH serves followers

We have seen that FAITH is one of the Christian leadership Apps that grows our influence and widens our kingdom impact. As we learn to hear God and pursue in FAITH the revelations that he gives us, we will find our sphere of influence increasing. This is because our FAITH offers at least two spin-offs to those we influence – hope and hunger.

1. Hope

Pursuing a FAITH vision together provides people with hope for the future, purpose for sacrifice, and reason to risk. Following Jesus involves significant sacrifice. The people you influence are constantly giving themselves to ministry and service. **A leader with a FAITH vision from God breathes life and meaning into service, sacrifice and suffering.** Without hope, people will eventually burn out and give up. Hope inspires and encourages and makes sacrifices significant.

Pursuing a FAITH vision together provides people with hope for the future, purpose for sacrifice, and reason to risk.

Without FAITH-inspired hope, Christians are merely keeping the wheels turning. There are many churches, ministries and Christians who have nothing immediate to aim for. They have a future hope in the new creation, but the present is merely marking time. There is no burning goal or cause that grips their life. They are basically just surviving. They lack present hope.

As your FAITH breathes hope for those you influence, they will join you in trusting God for his future. However, if they are constantly disappointed by shattered dreams, you will eventually lose influence because it will become obvious that you are just guided by a sense of optimism, not God. But if your FAITH is justified and God eventually fulfils his promises, then you will gain influence because hope will grow in those around you. They will want to continue to join you in pursuing God's vision.

2. Hunger

From hope grows hunger and more FAITH. When people see God work as they display FAITH in his revelation, a hunger grows in them for more of God and his power. They become expectant of what God can do in and through them and FAITH increases. There is nothing like seeing God fulfilling his promises to inspire a deeper trust in us.

At its best, this growing hunger is both for God and for his work. A hunger for God drives us deep into seeking him and submitting to him. We are more able to hear his voice and obey his direction. A hunger for God's power (when stemming from a hunger for God and not just a hunger for the miraculous) causes us to take risks and step out in faith. We become less content with the status quo and more expectant of God's supernatural work.

Conclusion

FAITH is one of the four key APPS in growing our influence God's way. As we have seen, CROP enables us to achieve things with God, but FAITH takes us further. It helps us to see what God wants and then pursue these FAITH visions even when there is no immediate likelihood of success. It enables us to take more risks and to hold more tightly onto God's promises. It grows our courage.

As those we influence join us in this FAITH venture, their hope in God's will and work grows and they become more hungry for and more expectant of what God will do. This makes a huge difference to their effort and endurance. Paul noticed this in the Thessalonians:

We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thess. 1:2-3)

My personal reflection

I have seen the power of God's FAITH visions many times. When I became a pastor of a suburban church, God gave me a vision of what he wanted the church to become. I couldn't share this with the people at the time because it would have frightened them, but I treasured it in my heart and held onto it in FAITH. Despite numerous early disappointments and setbacks together with some strong opposition, my FAITH and courage held and I continued to believe God's revelation. I never gave up on the FAITH vision.

Gradually I was able to share this FAITH vision with the church family who readily embraced it, confirming that it really was God's plan for us. And with amazement over 10 years we saw God do all that he had promised. We watched in awe as God worked in power, changing lives and drawing many into his kingdom. Recently, I was talking to a couple who has been there through this period of ministry. They shared that these had been the best years of their lives spiritually. This is the power of a God-given vision that is pursued with FAITH and courage.

I wish that I had the gift of faith (1 Cor. 12:9), but this is not a gift that God has chosen to give me.

I am naturally fearful and pessimistic. I don't take big risks easily. I like to play it safe. I don't have great dreams. But I have learned to hear God and pursue FAITH visions with commitment and courage. This is what God asks of all Christians of influence.

JOURNAL ACTIVITY 5.5

Checkpoint 5: FAITH

TOTAL:

Please rate each statement on the following scale:

- 5 - Strongly Agree;
- 4 - Agree;
- 3 - Neither Agree nor Disagree;
- 2 - Disagree;
- 1 - Strongly Disagree

TOTAL the scores for each quality and put the total in the box. This gives a score out of 25. A score below 20 indicates significant room for growth.

1. **My desperation for God to make a difference through me pervades my prayer life.**
2. **I have sensed God speak about what he wants me to do.**
3. **I continue to hold on to the things God says even when they don't seem likely.**
4. **I often speak with faith about God's plans for our future.**
5. **The people I share life with are hopeful about what God will do through us.**

Describe briefly what you have learned about FAITH as essential for Christian leaders. Reflect on your self-assessment (above) and discuss the steps you are taking (or will take) to develop FAITH.

Discussion Questions: Faith

Choose the most appropriate questions.

- 1.** What issues have the readings and journaling raised for you? Share your answers, thoughts and questions.
- 2.** Share your response to Journal Activity 5.5.
- 3.** Who has influenced you with a FAITH vision? What was the vision and why were you influenced? How could you tell this was a revelation from God and not just this person's great idea?
- 4.** How can you tell when a vision is a revelation from God? Does it matter? What has God revealed to you in the past? What happened? What FAITH vision are you presently pursuing (if any)?
- 5.** FAITH visions don't have to be original. Often our FAITH visions are passed to us from those who influence and lead us (e.g. our church leadership or our boss). Do you carry any FAITH visions that you have received from others?
- 6.** What processes can help us discover God's vision for our ministry/organisation/team? What have you found helpful? How does God speak to you?
- 7.** What do you do when you are leading a ministry or a team and you just don't have any FAITH vision? Is it essential to have a revelation from God that you are pursuing?
- 8.** What are some of the ways that Christian leaders can share vision/revelation with those they are seeking to influence. What has worked for you?
- 9.** What is the most important thing you can do at the moment to offer clearer hope to those you are seeking to influence?

Case Studies: Faith

Choose the most relevant case studies to discuss.

- 1.** Jess is a dreamer. She loves thinking about what could be and has lots of visions that she feels she gets from God. But most of her ideas are so far out there that everyone else ignores them. It's just impossible to see them actually happening. When she enthusiastically pushes her visions in her circle of influence, everyone goes quiet. Jess is very disappointed. She feels that she's surrounded by people with little faith or passion. She doesn't think that people want to have faith in God at all. She feels that her faith is actually lessening her influence. Do you think she is right? What should Jess do?
- 2.** Melissa leads a playgroup for young mums. After attending a seminar on faith and vision, she decided to fast and pray for God's revelation for her playgroup. But nothing really came. Oh she wants to see community mums become Christians and occasionally invites the mums to church. But she doesn't really see this as a clear, specific revelation from God that she needs to hold on to by faith. There's plenty to do in just keeping the playgroup operating and things seem to be going well. But Melissa keeps wondering if her leadership team (two other Christian mums) would be more motivated and "hungry" if they had a clear vision. What do you think? What could God's revelation look like in this setting?
- 3.** Ryan leads (with a team of 3) the year 8 section of his church's large youth group. There are about 25 kids when everyone turns up and each youth group night he has about an hour just with his year 8 group. After praying for God's leading, Ryan felt clearly that God was saying they should do more to disciple the Christian kids in the group and get them praying for their non-Christian friends. He did a great job communicating this vision to his leadership team and they all committed to being part of a fortnightly small group for the Christian kids. But it hasn't gone well. Despite their prayer and effort, the number of year 8s attending the prayer group has dwindled from 10 to 2 over the last six months. The "Christian" kids are immature and are flat out talking about God, let alone praying for their friends. Ryan is confused about this revelation thing. Is it possible he got it wrong? Does this matter? Should he continue to pursue the vision that came so clearly? What would you suggest to Ryan?
- 4.** Madeline is a primary State School Phys Ed teacher who had a God-given vision to establish a new sporting competition for schools in her region. She convinced many of the local Phys Ed teachers to join this competition and it is running well, providing a great opportunity for the children involved to learn to work as a team and to build team spirit (strong kingdom values). The competition now needs consolidation, but Maddy wants to move on to new FAITH visions for her school. However, she is concerned that if she stops pushing and supporting the vision, the competition will lose momentum. What are her options? How does she know whether to stay involved or move on?