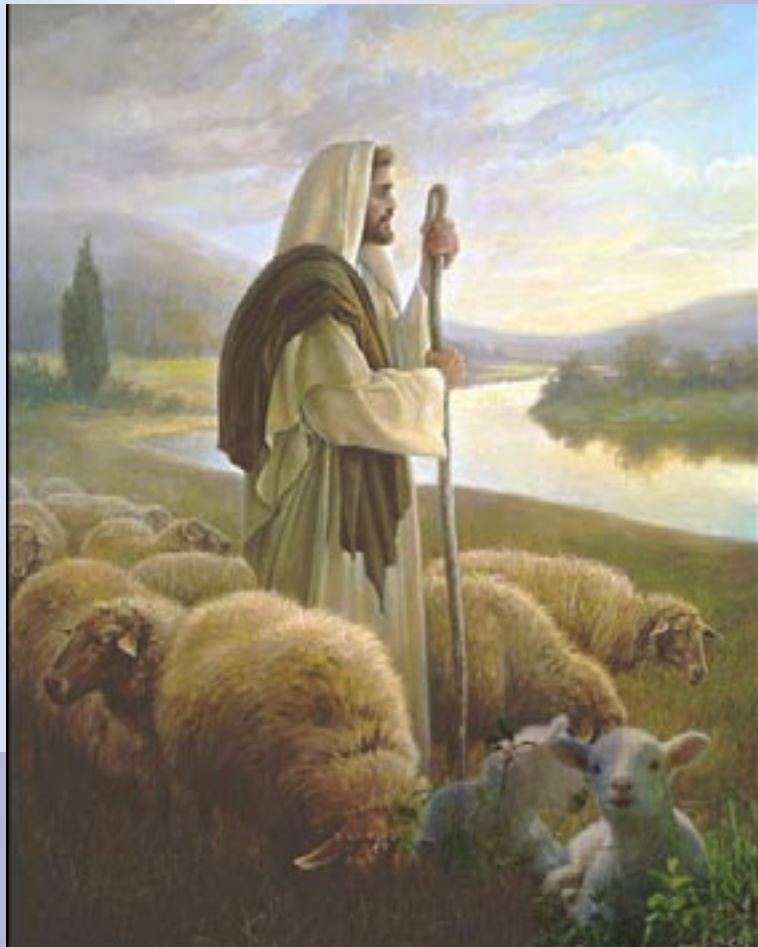


Impact

Integral Mission Prayer & Action Team
for American Renewal



Listening to the heartbeat of God
a Series Study in Redemptive History



Series One

EXTREME MAKEOVER: DISCOVERING YOU IN THE HEARTBEAT OF GOD

Study: "Listening to the Heartbeat of God"

Lesson One:

The Seers

Isaiah 1:1

*"He tends his flock like a shepherd:
He gathers the lambs in
his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that
have young."*

— Isaiah 40:11



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The Seers

“But blessed are your eyes because they see...”

– Matthew 13:10

KEY SCRIPTURE:

Isaiah 1:1

1. The Vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amos saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Introduction

The couple stroll leisurely on the sidewalk, arm in arm, each holding in their free hand their own long, red-tipped white cane that they tap-tap-tap on the sidewalk ahead, swinging the canes side to side, searching for unseen obstacles.

I watch amazed as I realize they are blind, but not immobile or unaware. They are out, enjoying the sunshine warming their faces, the aroma of spring flowers titillating their nostrils, and the gentle breeze brushing their faces. The laughter of children at play, the sounds of cars passing by, and the bark of the dog across the street place them in the middle of activity they share through sound.

It’s just that they cannot see – as “ordinary” people do. The canes substitute for sight, in a negative way: long enough to stretch several feet ahead of the couple, the canes expose to them through touch what they cannot see, enabling them to avoid stumbling over unseen curbs, or bumping into walls invisible to them.

We label them “physically challenged.” Yet, they face the challenge and seem to overcome. I am inspired, and think of the many challenges I cringe from: if they are blind, they are brave, courageous and creative beyond my experience. I want to learn from them to refuse to merely accept my own limitations imposed by – *misfortune?*

In fact, I realize that they see – but in a different way.

.....



Another couple meets with a congregation of several hundred on a Sunday morning. Dressed smartly, they step into the spacious auditorium to take their place among the leadership group guiding the fortunes, spiritual and material, of this church group. They pride themselves in their spiritual knowledge. They quote the right scripture, pay their tithes, and sing the right hymns and choruses.

They see well enough to notice the fellow who has come into the service in cutoffs and sandals. They sneer accordingly.

They also note that Elder Brown has purchased a new Cadillac. Time for us to make a trade in, the one suggests to the other. Surely so, the other replies. How about a Lincoln?

“We’re going to receive an offering for victims of the AIDS crisis in Africa,” a speaker interrupts their conversation. “We also are helping displaced families in Colombia, and street children in Brazil. So give generously.”

What? The one observes to the other – isn’t Africa the responsibility of Africans? And what have we to do with Colombia and Brazil. After all, we have been sending missionaries for more than a century! Haven’t they learned by now how to believe, confess, and pray for their own needs? How blind they are!

.....

But who is actually blind here?

In fact, there are seers, and then there are Seers.

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

What the Seers saw

Isaiah 1:1 tells about a “vision” seen by the prophet Isaiah (for info about Isaiah see the sidebar). In fact, the “vision” makes up the content of the entire biblical book of Isaiah of which verse one is a part. So why not just say, “The book of Isaiah...?”

Well, Isaiah was a Seer first and only then a writer; in fact, because he was a Seer, the real author of the biblical book of Isaiah is God.

POINTS TO PONDER:

- What does it mean to “see?”
- Is there more than one way to “see?”
- How many sets of “eyes” do you have?

In Ephesians 1:18 Paul the Apostle records his prayer, asking God “that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened...” What in the world does he mean?



A LOOK AT LIFE:

The debate about Social Security in the U.S offers clues about curious ways we look at life.

According to the game of life as played in the U.S., the goal is retirement, the object is enough to retire, and the hope is that you will live to enjoy it.

How differently the same game is played in the southern hemisphere.

The goal for many there is something to eat, the object is to scrounge, beg, borrow, or steal enough to stay alive today, and the hope is that you will live through the night to see tomorrow.

So in the U.S., Charlie retires at 67 with a \$million in the bank and Social Security checks coming in. At 68 Charlie dies.

In Brazil. Carlos, a Rio street kid, dies hungry in abject poverty at 17, the victim of a renegade "death squad."

Which of the two has won the game? Why? By what set of rules? Would other rules make a difference?

See Ecclesiastes 6:1-12; what is Solomon saying? Compare 12:9-14

This principle penetrates the entire Bible and is what sets it apart from every other book: the Bible is truly a "vision" received from God and only seen by the writers who faithfully recorded what they saw – the Bible writers, then, one and all, were "Seers."

This principle – often referred to as "divine revelation," or "inspiration" – constitutes a study in itself, so cannot be our primary focus here, but serves as the critical foundation for an important question: what do *you* see?

Seeing what life is about

Perhaps this is the ultimate question of life. Think about the two couples in the opening vignettes above. Do you not think the physically blind couple "sees" more of what life really is about than the "seeing" couple in church?

In spite of physical blindness, they enjoy the sunshine, the flowers, the breeze, and a community of activity around them. They will never drive a car let alone own one, but seem to be at peace with themselves and others without having to have "more."

How important is this? Consider that when the short span of this life is over, it will not matter how many cars they have missed owning; but their direct experience of the creation will be with them forever, and depending on their personal faith, might even go with them into a "new heavens and a new earth," where they will experience more of the same. So they really can "take it with them – right?"

What other things do you suppose we might keep forever?

The couple in church, on the other hand, appeared to have it all together; yet, although seeing, they did not see. Another car seems to matter more to them than helping people in desperate need. What they see about life seems to add up to nothing more than "more" possessions.

What will they have to take into eternity? Or does this really matter? Maybe life is all here...

Do you see how what we see about life actually filters

out what we do not see? Do you see that if we see life as filled with “things,” we will become blind to the true, eternal “stuff” of God’s creation?

Seeing you in the heartbeat of God

The point we make is that true “seeing” is about discovering where you are going and why, and thus what you should pursue, and what you should pursue is determined by what you see about life. In short, to see truly, accurately, and clearly requires that you know who you are, and this requires that see who God is.

This is so because to discover who you are you have to see you in the heartbeat of God to know “Why?” God is love, the Seer John tells us. All he does flows from his heart of love, meaning the entire creation is an act of love, including you: but why?

You must know why to be you and see the rest of life clearly. You are the special creation of God, a child of love. To develop this awesome reality for the glory of God and your good, and become fully who you are as the special creation of God, you must see yourself in this love of God for entire cosmos.

In other words, you have to “see” what God has in mind for the whole thing.

Well, to do this, you must become a Seer – you must learn to see what God sees.

Awesome! But how in the world...?

Glad you asked.

How to be a Seer, not just a seer

Each of us, one and all, needs an extreme makeover: not plastic surgery as in the TV program, but spiritual surgery as in being born from above (see the sidebar for more info). Only then will you be able to see because you then will be able to become a Seer...

“No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
No mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those



INSIDE INFO:

When John the Apostle says, “God is love” — 1 John 4:16 — what does he mean?

John Piper comments: “[I]t belongs to the fullness of God’s nature that he cannot be served but must overflow in service to his creation. The very meaning of God is a being who cannot be enriched but always remains the enricher. To be God is to be incapable of being a beneficiary of any person or power in the universe. Rather, Godness involves a holy impulse ever to be the benefactor.”

Thus, “In his essential nature and all his actions, God is loving,” says the NIV Study Bible. At the same time God is “spirit, light, holy, powerful, faithful, true, and just.”

In short, God’s love is goodness with unlimited potential wrapped up in a purposeful intent to do good with the sovereign power to fulfill the intent. This goodness in action is unwrapped and released as we believe and obey.



POINTS TO PONDER:

Why do you suppose there are so many different opinions about things in the church today?

Think about this: “seeing” is a process. Stated theologically, “revelation is progressive.”

Even with solid foundational truths in place, we have to grow into our understanding of them.

So when asked, “Do you believe in absolute truth?” I answer, “Of course. But I do not believe in absolute understanding.”

Absolute truth belongs to God; it is what he is, his nature. Rather than a body of rules filed away as “Absolute Truth,” this Truth comes to us in a person called Jesus who is “the way and the truth and the life” — John 14:6.

This same truth now dwells in us — we who are the body of Christ.

Accordingly, we are being “built up until we reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God...” Aha! That’s it!

When we “become mature, attaining to...the fullness of Christ” opinions will be left behind.

— Ephesians 4:12, 13;

who love him –
but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.”

– 1 Corinthians 2:9, 10

No, I do not mean that you will be invited to write the next biblical book and so “fatten up” the Bible! The Whole Revelation that is the Bible is complete. God has let us know in many substantial and meaningful ways that the Blueprints for a New Creation — i.e., the Bible — are in place.

Seers today are those who learn through the guidance of the Holy Spirit to read the Blueprints, and see what is therein set against the backdrop of the whole creation. These Seers then submit what they see to the corrective seeing of the whole community of Seers in the Church, the body of Christ.

The True and Accurate Vision is a communal one. There are not now, nor have there ever been Lone Ranger Seers in the Community of God. Even the ancient prophets like Isaiah spoke a message within the context of community living out a communal message.

So seeing is a process.

Imagine the blinded couple in the first vignette above. Suppose they had been blind from birth. Then suppose they suddenly were able to see. What would they be seeing? How would they know the color “blue,” for example, as distinct from “red,” or a rose from a lily? “Seeing” so as to “see” — that is, so as to distinguish this from that — would require time and assistance, or teaching, in other words.

Seeing, then, is more than light flooding in. It is receiving and understanding light reflecting from other things in a way that presents distinctive designs in reality. Seeing is to discern the meaning of the nuances, the ridges, the valleys, the shadows, and the shadings of reality so as to distinguish one thing from another, such as right from wrong, good from bad, and up from down.

The newly sighted see, surely, but only learn over time *what* they see. For this reason, to see clearly we need the Family of God as surely as a baby needs

Mom and Dad. Born full-sighted, babies have no more idea what they see, or who they are, than one who sees nothing at all.

But they are seers, meaning *what they have is the potential to see clearly.*

In a similar way, in being “born again” you have the Spirit of God who is The Seer. He purposely places you in the Family of God where you can become a Seer within a community of Seers from Adam and Eve to the present.

So what do you see?

There are clues for what to look for. For example,

WHOM DO YOU SEE?

As indicated above, real Seers are part of a special community of God. It follows that if your “vision” is accurate you will see

The People of God

What Isaiah saw concerned “Judah and Jerusalem,” the Jewish nation and its capital city, both of which were synonymous at the time with the people of God. So in fact, what he saw concerned him, too – kind of like you looking in the mirror to see you staring back at you!

So do you, too, see you in the vision God gives to you? In fact, to be a True Seer you have to see yourself in this vision accurately in order to see others as God sees them, and only by seeing others as God sees them can you become who you are meant to be. To see you accurately through the eyes of God – seeing through the eyes of God, by the way, is the essence of true “vision” – in the context of the people of God within the creation of God is what the Bible refers to as “humility.” And humility, according another biblical Seer, Solomon, is a basic key to the abundance of God:

“Humility and the fear of the LORD
bring wealth and honor and life.”

– Proverbs 22:4

Awesome!



INSIDE INFO:

In the years following the ‘70’s era Watergate burglary that forced President Richard Nixon from office, a key cohort in the break-in came to Christ while in prison.

Chuck Colson then told his story in a book. Now, a 20th anniversary edition of Born Again is in the bookstores.

Colson’s book sparked a wave of “born again” mania that peaked with pornographer Larry Flint claiming to have been “born again” – even as he continued to deal porn.

Flynt’s pop culture “born-againism” showed how the concept had morphed in the popular mindset: “born again” had come to mean a mere “decision” to accept Jesus.

You may still think of it this way. Many do. But in fact the popular concept stands the biblical truth on its head, turning a sovereign act of God into a human prerogative.

The biblical truth is literally, “born from above,” which means, John says, “not...of human decision... but born of God.” – see, John 1:12; 3:3-8



INSIDE INFO:

One of the best definitions of “humility” to be found is offered by Paul the Apostle in Romans 12:3.

While not using the word specifically, he defines it:

“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.”

In short, Paul says, “See you as God sees you.”

It follows that this means, “be in life who God intends you to be.”

Thus, humility is not weakness, shyness, or taking the hindmost.

Rather, it is an accurate assessment of self in the context of the community of God in service to God.

Further, it is confidence in oneself based on confidence in God. That is, you believe what God says about you and act to fulfill his purpose in you.

Thus, you make unique contributions to the community, and the community to you in a reciprocal relationship. This is humility, which turns out to be love in action, too.

Hey, this is worth finding out about!

Actually, you will discover in Isaiah chapter one and then throughout the book that God’s people in “Judah and Jerusalem” failed to see themselves accurately within the vision of God, and therefore disobeyed God and misused others. For this they fell under the awful judgment of God, more surely, certainly and thoroughly than any criminal condemned for rape, pillage and murder; and deservedly so. On the other hand, you will also see the gracious forgiveness, restoration and blessing of God extended to his people who repent and turn to him in humility, people not merely from among “Judah and Jerusalem,” but also from all nations on Planet Earth.

Do you see you among these blessed people of God around the globe? God’s vision is global, this vision for “Judah and Jerusalem” is global, and only as you see you in the global vision can you really know who you are, where you are, why you are, and where you are going! But once you see this, you really see.

Hey, Seer! Welcome to the seeing community of God, the community poised to enter into the work of God and therefore prepared to receive the choice blessing of God!

Now, that is awesome!

Equally awesome, is to see within this seeing community

The Prophets of God

In the simplest scriptural sense, a prophet is one who proclaims a message from God. The terms, “prophet,” and “Seer,” are often interchangeable. The reason for this is as explained above: the prophet was to speak what God revealed. So he would “see” and only then “proclaim,” or prophesy; hence, the term “prophet:” the Prophet was a Seer who proclaimed what he saw.

In fact, Isaiah became a prophet on the basis of what he saw. As we will see in chapter six, Isaiah

“...saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and...I heard the voice of the Lord saying,

Lesson One: The Seers

‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And [Isaiah] said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’ [The Lord] said, ‘Go and tell this people...’

– Isaiah 6:1-9

There follows the initial message Isaiah was to deliver to “Judah and Jerusalem.”

Ok, so what are we to make of this?

First, that true Seers depend entirely upon what God shows them. This goes not only for the “Prophets” who received the scriptural revelation, but for you and me who are “Seers” by virtue of our new birth into the Community of Seers, which is the Church of Jesus, the Family of God. Paul the Apostle explains,

“...those who are led by the Spirit of God are the Sons of God.”

– Romans 8:14

And,

“We have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in words taught by the Spirit expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.”

– 1 Corinthians 2:12, 13

We will discuss this more fully in coming lessons; we merely emphasize the point here that what the “Prophets” of old enjoyed as a mere handful of True Seers, the entire Community of God now shares in, even if with a different application in practice.

Referring to the phenomenon of believers in Jesus becoming newly anointed Seers “declaring the wonders of God in...tongues,” Peter explains,

“This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

‘In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all
people. Your Sons and daughters
will prophesy, your young men
will see visions...’

– See, Acts 2:11-17



INSIDE INFO:

Who were the Seers?

"...the prophet of to-day used to be called a seer." — 1 Samuel 9:9

"There was no essential difference between a seer and a prophet in ancient times. The person popularly designated as a prophet at the time of the writing of 1,2 Samuel was termed a seer in the time of Saul..."

— NIV Study Bible



POINTS TO PONDER:

Who are the prophets in the Church today?

But Moses replied, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”

— Numbers 11:29

Indeed, Moses’ vision has come to pass: today, any given believer in the Church, the body of Christ, potentially can prophesy because the Spirit of God is not merely on them, but in them (see Romans 8:9-14).

“I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy,” Paul says, implying that all have the potential to do so (see 1 Corinthians 14:5).

Does this mean, then, that everyone prophesies?

Or if anyone happens to prophesy, that they are a prophet?

“[I]n the church God has appointed...prophets...”

— 1 Corinthians 12:28;
compare Ephesians 4:11

This “prophesying” and “seeing” was to mark the reign of the Messiah, the Christ, who is Jesus, and it does. Further, this prophesying is not *qualitatively* different than that of the Seers of old; rather it is *quantitatively* different in that it is dispersed through the body of Christ on the earth, the Church of Jesus; thus, it is not concentrated in the few, but overflows to the many, so that the accuracy of the “seeing” is totally dependent upon the entire community: remember, no lone rangers?

You need me, I need you, and we need the entire body, the Church, meeting as local communities of believers. We, together in a worshipping, witnessing, teaching, preaching, serving community are the prophets of God, with each one of us dependent upon the other for the totality of what God is saying to the world.

Let me repeat the point made above: true Seers are dependent entirely upon what God shows them. This is us, true Seers as believers in Jesus made alive by the Spirit of God within us individually and corporately, dependent totally upon what God is saying to us, which can only be discerned truly and accurately in the context of the True Community of God.

The second point we should make is that True Seers live out fully what God shows them. To the point of sacrificing their own lives rather than betray the God of the Message, the ancient prophets embodied the message they proclaimed. We can do no less, and indeed, are called to do more.

Thus, you have to ask,

WHEN DO YOU SEE?

That is, we must know our moment in history. What do we see God doing in the earth *now*? To know this, we must know the totality – to the extent possible – of what God has been doing, in order to discern where he is going, and thus how the present moment fits into the plan. If this seems strange, that only underscores our naiveté about the ways of God in history.



“When” determines the opportunity

Due to this naiveté, a glaring failure — along with many successes — of the “born-again,” evangelical camp in modern times is the failure of vision based upon absence of historical sensitivity. Lacking historical context, our vision decays into born-again escapism. The vast popularity of the fictional *Left Behind* Series of dispensational futurism is directly due to this: we embrace a fantasy future to a degree inversely proportional to the quality of a real vision.

The lack of historical sensitivity, in turn, blinds us to opportunity, because only as we see ourselves in the context of history can we discern the patterns of God leading into the future: the footsteps of Jesus, if you please, not in the sand, but rather, etched on the rock of purpose upon which he is building his Church.

As a result of missing God’s pattern, we tend to flee from critical responsibilities because too often the mission is clear as mud. The result can be a kind of do nothing busy-work of religiosity covered by basking in a sentimental past tied to an ideological future that just skips over the present opportunity.

By knowing “when” we can seize the opportunity

Notice, Isaiah knew exactly his moment in history. He prophesied

“...during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah kings of Judah.”

– Isaiah 1:1

God positioned him in a certain place for a certain time to seize a certain opportunity. Of course, he prophesied in part about the future, and spoke in continuity with the past; yet, the thrust of his message as a Seer was prophetic, which means primarily he called the people to repentance, restoration and mission in the present.

But like many of us, the people were reluctant to hear; rather, like the church too often today, they celebrated traditions from the past emptied of substance, while hoping in popular views of an idealistic future, just in order to ignore the prophet’s

POINTS TO PONDER:

“Instead of this fascination with the future and this carelessness about the past, there’s a whole stretch of verses in [the Bible] that remind us to remember history.

“By focusing on history we don’t become captive to our local culture and captive to our generation. [Only then can we] really have the independence [to live out the Gospel] because we’re lifted above America, the West, and the 21st century. We see things with God’s perspective.” — Os Guinness



call to repentance and obedience in the present. The result was tragic.

By knowing “when” we can do kingdom business

To avoid such an outcome ourselves, we have to own the present, in order to engage in the business of the kingdom. In this regard, Jesus said simply,

“Do business till I come.”

– Luke 19:13 NKJ

He indicated not just any business, but his business, the business of his kingdom, which is anything but escapism. Seers do not look for ways out. They envision ways into the culture, the environment, the society, the political structure, and the economy in order to transform a people through a message of repentance and restoration of the whole.

So what happens when Seers don’t see?

Instead of Isaiah’s willing response to the Lord referred to above (see Isaiah 6), suppose he had said, “No way, Lord! Don’t send me!” In fact, suppose he had never seen “the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted...?”

With no disrespect to the very real couple in the vignette opening this study, suppose Isaiah had absconded with a white, red-tipped cane and, instead of seeing God, had just gone tap-tap-tapping down the street enjoying the sunshine, the breeze, the birds and the laughter?

After all, you cannot condemn the visually challenged for being blind, right?

What happens when Seers don’t see?

Let’s relate this to us. “You are the light of the world,” Jesus said. “A city on a hill cannot be hidden” (see, Matthew 5:14). So what if we have a power outage and the light goes out? The world falls into darkness...

Tragic, right?

But then suppose the light actually goes out, not due to a power outage, but to someone deliberately

LIGHTS OUT



pulling the plug?

We argue here that in many ways we have deliberately pulled the plug, and rationalize doing so with an appeal to dispensational escapism. Sadly, it seems Darbyite doctrine condones, in fact demands, the pulling of the plug. Lights out, so Jesus can come?

Conclusion

Isaiah's mission was to keep the lights on, whatever the result. This is our mission no matter how many disagree. Of course, this mission is to be clarified and carried out in the context of community. None of us see clearly enough to go it alone. We must have the corrective strengths of the entire community of faith. As we commit to this communal strategy for mission, blessing will flow over in abundance to each member of the community.

Success is an option. Faithfulness is not. As Seers, we are not called to succeed. We are called to deliver a message to which we bear witness by living it out to the full. But when we do this, God truly enjoys granting success:

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

— John 15:7, 8

This is in keeping with Jesus' promise:

“...seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you as well.”

— Matthew 6:33

Thus, Seers establish the habit of carefully listening to God in prayer, believing what he says, and relating to others what they see about the task at hand. Then they get busy asking God to bear witness to what they see so that the community can receive, enhance, and participate in it. In this way, God working through his people joined together in the unity of faith will bring the vision to pass in ways surpassing “all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work in us.” — Ephesians 3:20



"Your word is a lamp..."

— Psalm 119:105