

## Read Isaiah 58

In July of 2009 – I wrote these words in the margin of my Bible next to Isaiah 58.

“Isaiah 58 is one of the key Scriptures that God continues to impress upon me as I follow His leading to WFMC: that if we as a church will serve the poor, then...

- He will bring healing (v8)
- He will bring light (v8)
- He will go before us and behind us (v8)
- He will answer our prayers in amazing ways (v9)
- He will make us a light that shines in the darkness (v10)
- He will guide our steps (v11)
- He will satisfy our needs (v11)
- He will strengthen us (v11)
- He will make us beautiful and a source of nourishment to the world (v11)
- He will allow us to become agents of transformation in our world (v12)  
→ in the pattern of Nehemiah – who was a “repairer of broken walls” and “restorer of streets with dwelling.”

“Knowing God’s ways” (v2a), “experiencing His transforming presence” (v2b), and having our “prayers powerfully answered” (v4) – is what we all long for, and yet what I sense God saying to me (both by His Spirit and through His Word in Isaiah 58) is that the path to living in these realities will not come through doing more “religious exercises” (v1-6) – but through entering into a kind of “fast” where we focus our time, talent, and treasures on reaching and serving the poor and marginalized of our world.

In other words...

If we really want “to know God’s ways,” (v2a) – then we need to live out v6ff.

If we really want more of “the presence of God,” (v2b) – then we need to live out v6ff.

If we really want God “to powerfully answer prayer,” (v4) – then we need to live out v6ff.

My deep conviction is that God wants to (and will) do miracles of healing in our church – not because we’re “earning them” via our concern for the poor – but because it’s in His nature to bless obedience. Healing and miracles and transformation are simply what will happen when God’s presence comes in fullness!

6/23/2009

Father, thank you for a great first day of studying Nehemiah. I didn't even make into the library. Since I got here before the library opened, I just read and studied and made notes while sitting in my car here in the library parking lot...

One of the things I've continued to sense ever since feeling You call me to study the Book of Nehemiah (and also related to this sense that You are calling me to WFMC) – is that You are calling me to WFMC to because you want this church to join You in the **transformation of the nation of Burundi**.

I'm not yet to the place where I feel like I can or should say any of this out loud, though.

Like Nehemiah (in chapter 2), I'm supposed to keep this vision to myself for right now. Lord, I pray that You would be confirming/clarifying/refining what You're saying to me. Lord, I don't want to be giving into visions of grandiosity. At the same time, I don't want to shy away from the fullness of what You are calling me to.

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(Fast-forward 5 months)

1/10/2010

I spent time yesterday in the sanctuary and in my office praying about this vision that You've laid on my heart for WFMC – specifically regarding the poor of the Wenatchee Valley and the widows and orphans of Burundi. I came to a breaking point in my spirit – as I wrestled with the magnitude of the vision and my inability to communicate it – not to mention how to make something like this happen. And yet I sensed Your Spirit leading me not to a clear articulation of the vision (though I sense that is coming) – or to a strategy for how the vision will be realized – but simply to a willingness to declare it.

I wept as I committed myself to make this declaration. I realized (in that moment) that declaring this vision is no longer an optional assignment for me. It is part of Your calling on my life. It is a moral imperative. It is a matter of obedience now. And while there is incredible excitement associated with this vision, I'm also absolutely undone by it. My experience at prayer yesterday was cathartic. I haven't cried like that in a long time. I still don't think I understand the fullness of what pursuing and participating in this vision means (for me, for our church, for our Valley or for Burundi), but I've surrendered myself to being obedient to the vision You've called me to.

I pray now that You would bless my conversation with Amanda this next week – as I sense that now is the time to share with her this vision that You've impressed upon me.

1/15/2010

Father God, it's early in the morning – as I sit here in a hotel room in Orlando, Florida – amazed at the way in which You have confirmed the vision You laid on my heart so many months ago.

As Amanda and I sat in the Sea-Tac airport on Wednesday – I knew that was the time to share with her the vision You've impressed upon my heart. As I did – I could sense in her eyes that she resonated with what You're calling us to. Her heart is there. Her deep desire is to see Your Kingdom advanced in this way. Though I felt nervous and insecure about sharing something that seems so much bigger than me – Amanda's response confirmed that we will pursue this vision together...

Later that *same* day – we arrived at the conference (that I grudgingly resigned myself to) – and we listened to Bishop Kendall give one of the most inspiring talks I've ever heard. The text he preached from was Romans 5:20b:

“Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more...”

It was unbelievable the way his message confirmed the vision You have called me to declare. It was an out-of-the-box, unconventional, non-traditional proclamation of the gospel – and yet the message was right in line with Scripture. It was the message of God transforming the world. It was the good news that God is inviting us to join Him in dreaming big, “seemingly ridiculous” dreams – and to join Him in becoming change-agents (empowered and led by His Spirit) in this broken world.

The main illustration of brokenness that David used in his message was of the Hutu-Tutsi devastation in Rwanda, which of course, is precisely the situation of Burundi...

Amanda and I just sat there – looking at each other periodically – thinking, “Lord, we were supposed to be here – to receive this confirmation from You.”

Incidentally, we almost didn't make it. The other PNW couple (on the same flight as us) – did not make it to the event. The only reason we made it was because I sent the coordinator an e-mail about our time of arrival – asking her what we should do about it – and she offered to pick us up at the airport herself. She did – even though it meant being late to the event – which we all were.

A few minutes after the talk, as folks were mingling around, several talking with Bishop Kendall – Amanda and I just stood there in stunned silence at what had just transpired in the last 30 minutes. I couldn't believe the timing of hearing this talk – right on the heels of finally (after 8 months of holding this vision inside) speaking out the vision that You have given me for WFMC.

Lord, thank You for the amazing ways that You are confirming this calling on my life. After that event that first night – I shared with Amanda how I continue to be overwhelmed with gratitude at the way You father me. You are my Father. You lead me, You guide me, You instruct me, You correct me. You do all of the things that a good daddy does with his son.

1.16/2010

Father God, as we fly back home – I'm reflecting on yesterday's session with Supt Dennis Jeffrey – particularly the impromptu comments that he shared following his "talk."

He prefaced his comments (for which there were only about 20 of us in the room) with the statement that he sensed he was supposed to say what he was about to say in order to call out a vision that God had given one of us to be what he called a "soul millionaire."

As soon as he said those words ("soul millionaire"), I was undone. I'm not used to crying this much, Lord – but neither am I used to hearing You speak so clearly into my life through other people. The confirmations this weekend have been unbelievable – particularly when I reflect on the fact that I only came to a place of declaring this vision - right before getting on the plane to attend this conference. I sense that it's because You wanted Amanda and I to (together) hear Your voice confirming this calling on our lives – literally hours after speaking it out loud – so that we wouldn't miss what You're saying.

Later that night – in our concert of prayer – the invitation was made for us to confess/declare anything God was calling us to confess/declare...

My prayer was: "Father God, I acknowledge tonight that You are a God who reveals. You are a God who gives visions. And tonight I declare that You have not only given me a vision – but You have clearly confirmed it to me this weekend. Lord, I confess my fear. I confess my insecurity. But in this moment, I declare that I will be obedient to the vision that You are calling me to..."

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Lord Jesus, I still don't understand the fullness of this vision You've laid on my heart – but I am yielded. I know that it's about the physical, social, and spiritual transformation of Burundi – particularly through ministering to the widows and orphans. Perhaps even more specifically – I sense that it has to do with providing a home for every widow and orphan in Burundi who is presently without one – but there is still some ambiguity in the vision – or at least in my heart's understanding of the vision. I'm still fuzzy, too, about whether this vision for homelessness includes all those in the Wenatchee Valley who are homeless – not of their own choosing.

Holy Spirit, clarify the specifics of this vision to me so that I might be able to articulate them to Your people – unless ambiguity is supposed to be part of the journey for WFMC. I don't know that this is to be the case. My sense is that I need to share the rough sketch of this vision with Bishop Elie & Joy Buconyori – so they can begin to pray and think about it with me (and the WFMC leaders).

My sense is that I am supposed to let the Burundian leaders take the lead on the ways and means of bringing this vision about on the ground in Burundi. My sense is that my primary role is to declare this vision – and then watch Your Holy Spirit speak to hearts, call out gifts, and bring this vision to reality.

**I also sense (very strongly) that in the carrying out of this vision for the poor (specifically the poor of Wenatchee and the homeless widows and orphans of Burundi) – that the Wenatchee Valley will be transformed:**

- 1) There will be followers of Jesus who will begin to hear from God and step into the fullness of His purpose for their lives.**
- 2) There will be many, many people who will come to Jesus – as they witness the church being the church in this powerful way.**
- 3) Although there will be people who will participate in this vision for a while before the dots get connected in their minds/hearts about who Jesus really is – many will eventually surrender themselves to the One whose Kingdom is being advanced through us. In other words, there will be some who will actually participate in the Kingdom – before they surrender themselves to the King of the Kingdom.**
- 4) Miracles of healing and community transformation will be connected to WFMC pursuing this vision – in the pattern of what is described in Isaiah 58.**