

Continuing Vision

Back in 1996, Val and I were part of a fellowship that had seen some very encouraging growth, with a number of people coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and a very real sense that God was at work by his Holy Spirit. There were small weekly house groups, where believers of different ages (both physical and spiritual) enjoyed getting together and sharing, learning and praying together. Relationships were being built and people were growing, individually and together.

Then some expressed a desire for change, initially a change of leadership structure, which led on to what seemed to me to be a fundamental change of approach, in my view both unnecessary and undesirable. As I expressed my misgivings, I was challenged by some to share what my own vision might be for the fellowship of which we had been part for the previous nine years.

In response, I wrote these notes, but I believe they were read by very few. Coming across them again recently and looking back over the intervening years, I believe that there may be some value in sharing them with a wider readership. My vision remains very largely unchanged, though it has developed from these basics and I would welcome any opportunity to expand on them.

To avoid undue embarrassment to anyone, I have substituted the word 'Fellowship' for the name of the actual group, and 'the village' for the name of our home village. This will not prevent anyone who is the least familiar with us and our history from knowing the actual identities involved, but it may spare some blushes!

Dave Taylor, March 2018

My Vision . . .

I believe that *God* very definitely has things that he wants to do in this area. Some of these things will cut across our own ideas and traditions - are we prepared to have our vision expanded and altered by the living *God*? At the heart of all that he is doing, I am convinced that he has one central desire . . .

. . . **for the whole church.** This does not mean the same thing as 'my vision for the Fellowship'. Jesus is coming back for a Bride who has made herself ready for him, who is one body, functioning properly,

mature, without spot of immaturity or wrinkle of senility. A few years ago, I began to see that man-made divisions are not only irrelevant, but non-existent in God's eyes, and the Lord started to challenge me to function on that basis. Perhaps the strongest word came to me late in 1992, when I was studying Haggai. Chapter 1 makes it very clear that the reason for the Jews' unfulfilled lives was that they were following their own plans and priorities rather than the Lord's. I could see a very direct parallel in our 'church life', an ambition for the success of the Fellowship and its satellite groups, rather than for building up the Body of Christ. All the time there was a general lack of real results in the shape of more folk coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and/or existing believers really growing in their knowledge and experience of God. I am not saying that these things were not happening at all; just less than they needed to be !

My conviction now is the the Fellowship will be most effective if we adopt the 'grain of wheat' approach of John 12:24. There is much in our midst that is very good and has the life of God in it. If we try to conserve it for 'our own house', the Lord will 'blow it away' as he did in Haggai 1. On the other hand, if we 'plant' it for the benefit of the Body of Christ as a whole, the fruit will be great and remain, even if it means that 'The Fellowship' as such will not necessarily continue as we know it. If this is unthinkable, where are our priorities?

I actually believe that, for the moment at least, the Fellowship will continue. In practical terms, Val and I see ourselves as part of the whole church in the village. This has resulted in our growing involvement with others, including the 'Christians Together' initiative, helping J---- with the older ones who have outgrown C-----, and leading weekly 'Growth Groups'. I think others in the Fellowship are doing this same sort of thing in their own localities and that this could well be expanded - more on this later !

. . . **for individual growth in Christ.** This is the foundation upon which all else stands or falls. Satan can put up with our meetings, our Bible study and even our evangelism, if we will just 'do' them and stay

out of real daily relationship with our Father. The biggest challenge to each of us is to 'abide' in Christ from day to day, to find our spiritual food and drink in him and not just in the latest sermon we have heard or book we have read. My own vision in this area is to make use of every opportunity to teach, train and encourage willing Christians into a real and growing 'walk'. My experience is that sequential teaching in the informal setting of the house group is very beneficial. I should like to have the opportunity for truly sequential teaching in the more formal setting of 'teaching meetings', perhaps using Sunday evenings or a weekend. We have had these with 'outside' speakers, but it would be good to make fuller use of the ministry which the Lord has already placed in our midst. I am not just thinking of myself here; I believe that there are others, and will be more!

. . . **for the development of gifts and ministry.** This follows on from the last point, in fact it would be difficult to draw a precise line between them. It has been very exciting to see individuals develop from almost total dependency to a position in which they in turn are helping others with their needs. I believe that there are three particular 'spheres' in which this development needs to be especially encouraged:

1) In individual conversation and prayer together. I would like to develop this more.

2) In the house group. The company of people we are learning to trust is a safe place to 'try out' what we feel God is saying to us, without fear of being hurt or rejected, and with every likelihood of being encouraged to step further forward. A good mix of natural and spiritual ages is beneficial, so long as all want to grow !

3) In the Sunday morning meeting. Some of the changes over the last few years have been necessary, but I am worried by the increasing trend towards a 'managed' meeting, largely led from the front and with a shrinking 'open' time. Believers (of all ages) need to be able to share what the Lord is doing in their lives and develop their gifts and ministries

one step further on from the house group, for the benefit of more people.

. . . **for the area.** I am sure it is no coincidence that we are from a very widely spread geographical area. Many of us come from places where there are Christian groups already meeting, but for various reasons we have not felt able to join with them. I believe that, as part of his vision for the whole church to be really 'perfected into a unit' (John 17:23, literal translation), our Father wants our fellowship to be increasingly with those believers who live near us. We can co-operate with his desire by moving our homes to a place where we want to be in fellowship, or by moving our fellowship to where we now live. This is not a 'law', but a direction in which I believe our Father wants us to move. In the process, one effective way to move into greater fellowship with other local Christians would be to meet in informal house groups, to study and share together, not as a 'Fellowship' meeting, but simply as folk who belong to Jesus. It is possible! As a result, our local links may become stronger than our Fellowship links and the Body of Christ would be built up locally . . . The 'grain of wheat' approach! I would love to be involved in this process as much as may be appropriate in different areas.

. . . **for evangelism.** My concern for the church stemmed, many years ago, out of a desire for effective evangelism. We returned to the UK in 1972 to find a real church base to 'send us out' in evangelistic work. I have come to see that disunity and unreality among Christians are the most damaging hindrances to evangelism and that visible unity and reality are the most useful supports of it. With these things increasingly in place and visible in the local church, I believe that evangelism, at home and further afield, will become a process much more of explaining what God is doing than talking about what he **can** do. 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10 - I look forward to it!

Dave Taylor. 27th July 1996

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