

Without vision – we perish

KARN Equipped conference. Nov 7, 2025

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Slides about RSR

Apple Pie and Whipped Cream.

One of my favourite desserts is apple pie. How do we get apple pie?

My Challenge to us all tonight is for us to get on the foundation of who we truly are as God's special creation, and what our place in the world is.

Teens. This one student we had was taking out the garbage

Proverbs 29:18

Where there is no vision, the people perish... (KJV)

Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint....
(ESV)

What does it look like when someone doesn't have a proper vision for the future?

Ty's story. – I remember when Ty showed up at Rock Solid. Angry, despondent, sad.....

Student application lines....

When it comes to teen suicide, do you think that teens actual want to die? Almost 100%, they don't want to die they just want the pain to stop.

When I was a youth pastor in the early 2000's in a small town in South West Saskatchewan, I came across 4 teens chatting outside the school. I knew them well, they came to my youth group regularly. Turns out they were talking, and even mocking another teen that had thrown himself into the fire at the gravel pit party Friday night. Those are the parties that don't happen in a small town but everyone knows they do.

As these teens made fun of the teen that was despondent enough to throw himself in the fire, I asked them if they really thought he wanted to die? “Do you think someone would really try to commit suicide with all those people around?”

I then asked them if any of them had ever contemplated it. They all acknowledged that they had, a couple of them had even thought of ways they could do it.

Any number of realities in a youth’s life can shift the core of their being. When I was 12 my mom died in a car accident. The normal I knew would never return. My teen years were rocky to say the least. Whatever vision I had for the future seemed to vaporize. My new mantra became, maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

Here is a cartoon that I think might often characterize how we see teens today.

Freedom cartoons.

So if we are not meant to live just to maximize pleasure and minimize pain, then what are we here for anyway?

At Rock Solid, we had a student that was relentlessly committed to bullying another student. And just so you know, this was met with real consequences and direct involvement from the staff to get him to stop. It seemed like he felt obligated to pass on the pain he felt from his relationships on to this other student.

So one day, he needed a ride into town for an appointment, and I got to drive him. As we drove, we talked and discussed his seeming relentless commitment to bullying, and he was committed to it and seemed to have no conscience about it being wrong. Now this young

man, said he was a Christian, so I could have this conversation on the basis of his relationship with God.

So I asked him, What is the reason we exist. Why are we here. Even though he was really new to the Christian faith, he quoted from the Westminster Confession and said, “the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever”. Then he said, “I have no idea what that means.”

So we talked about the nature of God being love, and he said, “what is love?” So as we pulled out of the gas station to head back to RSR I gave him my phone to read 1 Corinthians 13. So he read it.

1 Corinthians 13

[1] If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. [2] And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. [3] If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

[4] Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant [5] or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; [6] it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. [7] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

[8] Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. [9] For we know in part and we prophesy in part, [10] but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. [11] When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. [12] For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

[13] So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

After he finished reading, he said, “I have never loved anyone, and I don’t think I ever will”. This would also probably indicate how he perceived his relationships. I’m sure he would have also said, I don’t know what it means to be loved.

Just so I don’t leave you hanging with how things turned out with him, he decided to stop bullying, and without any internal feeling of affection towards that other student that really annoyed him, he simply began to love him as 1 Corinthians 13 described. Over the next several months, we watched him grow genuine caring friendships with the other students and a real emotional pain would emerge when someone would leave that he had come to care about. I think this surprised him.

Okay, I want us to take a journey through two levels of vision. An individual vision, how to understand our reason for being.

And a macro vision of how our individual story fits into God's grand story. I am convinced that the story we believe we are a part of is foundational to shaping the lives we will live and the choices we will make.

Dr. Larry Crabb in his book *Inside Out* proposes that a key reason that we are out of sorts is that we live in a world that is not what we were created for. We were created for a perfect world so it makes sense that we often feel uneasy and restless in a world that is corrupted and twisted by sin.

So in the context of knowing that we will never feel fully at home in this life, I believe there is still a pursuit of wholeness.

God created us a whole being so we need to pursue being well – mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually.

Mentally (slide) – do we challenge ourselves consistently to learn. Are you hungry to increase your mental capacity, including a variety of realms. Engage your teens with questions and puzzles just for fun. Do collective projects that encourages development of skills and community. When I was a youth pastor, we would do guys nights, and girls nights. A pretty big project we did as guys was to build a fairly elaborate skate board and bmx ½ pipe with a spine and roller in the middle. This was placed at the “Coffee House” drop in centre

and used for years. It was amazing to see those guys embrace the challenge and take a concept to completion.

Emotionally and socially (slide) – is it our practice to avoid emotionally difficult situations? We won't build resilience if we are not stressed and tested. Our kids and teens need opportunities to grow emotionally. Doing everything we can to remove emotional difficulty will not prepare our teens for the real world that they live in, nor the real adult world they are entering. But they need mentors to come along side them. We can walk with them through the emotional land-mines, but if we only shield and rescue them, they will not buildup the needed emotional strength for what life will throw at them, and they might just bale when others need them most as adults. Show them, and draw them into healthy community. Not perfect community, that doesn't exist. Walking through the challenges of life that inevitably come in isolation is totally different than in community. Physical presence is critical. Don't rely on technological connection. Sometimes that's necessary, but a teen that is physically isolated will often connect with people they shouldn't, or not learn the soft skills of interpersonal relationships. Our teens need healthy attachments to nurturing adult relationships. Many teens are far more attached to their peers than they are to their parents or to other healthy nurturing adults.

Story of Hunter, isolated in his room.....

Physically (slide) – I was listening to a podcast the other day, and the person being interviewed commented that the majority of people now days can not be described as healthy. Now I realize there is a whole spectrum of health and a million factors at play. But

let's be honest about what we know about baseline health. Is it healthy for a teen to drink energy drinks and vape? How about sit in front of a screen for 4-8 (or more) hours per day. This is destructive to their mental and emotional health as well. Our kids and teens were not created to live sedentary lives. So just on a real basic level, go for a walk in the fresh air and sunshine. Invite your teen, or teens for a walk. Create a outdoor or indoor youth pick up pickle ball challenge. Teach them to enjoy the process of physical activity.

How about nutrition. Always quick, processed meals are really not good for us. Supplements can significantly help physical, mental and emotional health

Spiritually (slide) – There are two ways for us to understand this dynamic. The first is a bit more generic. What are your core values? Have you ever asked a teen what their top values are? Just say, “I’ve been thinking about how our values shape our lives, so I wrote down my top 5 values and I wondered if you would be willing to share with me your top 3 or 5 values.” In our setting at RSR every student is assigned a staff mentor that they meet with regularly to talk through things and just build a relationship that opens the door to deeper conversations. A number of years ago, the student I was mentoring and I took a drive to town to grab a coffee and talk. So I asked him what his top 5 values were. He knew what I wanted to here so he said things like, “family, friends, money, vehicle”. So I asked him if I could share with him what I thought his top value was, he agreed. I said, “I think your top value is autonomy. You don’t want to be told what to do, you want to be in control of your life completely.” He thought about it for a minute then agreed, that that was probably true.

So, I'll challenge you to do this exercise, and then you can do this with the teens in your life. Write out what your top 5 values are. In one sense, don't over think it. Just right it down. Now, the next challenge is to track three things over the next month, and these three things will indicate whether you accurately wrote down your values, or if you just wrote down your ideals, knowing these should be your values.

Track how you spend your money. Track how you spend your time. Track your emotions. What makes you happy? What makes you sad? What do you get upset about?

Now take what you have kept track of for the month and overlay it on what you said were your values. Do they match?

You could also ask someone who knows you well what they think your top values are. This requires a bit more humility and vulnerability.

If you have teens or have a mentoring relationship with teens, walk them through this exercise as well. Challenge them to see a vision of 10 and 20 years down the road and how the values they live by today will greatly influence who they will be, and the life they will have down the road. I've found that most teens can give you pretty accurately what their parents lives and values should be, but will they live consistent with the values they know will be important to them in 20 or 30 years.

So, who we are on the inside and what matters most to us is what motivates and energizes us. It's what energizes us through difficulty and pain because we deem it to be worth it.

But what if our values are actually not good? What if they are in essence “hating the orchard” of God’s goodness? Like that student I mentored, its not going to work out for his good if he keeps his top value being personal autonomy. “No one can tell me what to do.”

So I want to take the rest of our time to talk about God’s vision for us. After all, He made us, and He promises to know what’s best for us.

Freedom Cartoon.

Galatians 5:1

[1] For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

When we think about the word freedom, what do we want it to mean? What do a lot of teens that we know want it to mean?

Galatians 5:13-15

[13] For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. [14] For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” [15] But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Here is the thing, if we live for pleasure, self autonomy, and to consume, we will be devoured. It doesn't work out. We weren't created for that. We were created to serve in love.

How do we actually fulfill this?

Galatians 5:16-18

[16] But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. [17] For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. [18] But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

The contrast:

Galatians 5:19-25

[19] Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, [20] idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, [21] envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

[22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. [24] And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

[25] If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Addictions: Preface and Page 155

We were created for intimate relationship with God, overflowing to love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, gentleness and self control.

Think about a struggling teen embracing this vision. Even though they won't (nor we) will live this out perfectly, the radical difference 5 years, 10 years, 20 years later is amazing. Look at Ty. He wouldn't trade his old life for what God has given him through relationship with Christ.

Now some of you probably think that I'm being a bit too simplistic. We didn't get into this mess overnight, and we aren't going to get out of it overnight.

Okay, so that is God's vision for us at a somewhat small or individual level. Now let's look at God's vision for us in a macro sense. How should we understand our place in the world much more broadly. In other words, what if we collectively live out what I've just talked about.

I want to hop into a few other scripture passages that maybe in some ways I'll be preaching to the choir here, but I really believe that our great privilege is to bring the teens that God brings into our lives into this eternal vision.

Acts 1:6-11

[6] So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” [7] He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. [8] But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” [9] And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. [10] And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, [11] and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Imagine you were there when Jesus was taken up. For one, it wasn't that long ago that Jesus was crucified, so all your hopes in Jesus were completely dashed. Then He rises from the dead. And now he just floats up and away. The angel's question does seem a bit odd. Isn't it obvious why they are staring up into the sky? So I think the question for us is are we just staring at the sky hoping our current reality is just swept away by Jesus return? Or are we going to get at the mission and vision He has given us.

So there is another contrast that I want to show again. Let me illustrate it this way:

One of my favourite activities is to go tubing. Tubing behind a boat, quad, horse, whatever.

When I was young, my brother pulled me behind a horse and ran me into a fence post

Do you ever feel like life, even the Christian life is a bit like this. We have a bit of an idea what's going on, but for the most part we are just along for the ride, hanging on for dear life till the ride is over, hoping we don't hit too many fence posts along the way.

So here is the contrasts between two ways of looking at our place in the world. Either we are here to just hang on the best we can, or God is telling us to quit gazing at the sky and get to work. But if we are going to get to work, what is that work supposed to be all about?

I Think God has given us the same vision or calling multiple times through the scriptures, the first one in Genesis 1.

Genesis 1:26-31

[26] Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

[27] So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

[28] And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." [29] And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth,

and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.
[30] And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.
[31] And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Genesis 2:15-18

[15] The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. [16] And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, [17] but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

[18] Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

Think about the foundation the world gives our kids compared to God’s vision. Evolution says it went from goo to you. You are a meaningless blob of cells so just get what you can when you can.

Somehow people still want some kind of good or moral code, but again, that’s like saying I love apple pie but don’t believe we need any orchards.

Here is a quick side note of the absolutely absurd inconsistency of the evolutionary narrative. My wife’s wedding ring had the main

diamond fall out without her realizing it. So now we need to not only get the claws repaired, but we also need to replace the diamond. So I showed it to a jeweller who gave me a quick run down on how this could be repaired. They can put a diamond in that has been mined in the traditional sense, or they can put a diamond in that has been manufactured in a lab. The jeweller's comment was that they can do in a lab what took nature billions of years. So out of curiosity, I looked up how long it takes to make a diamond in a lab. Apparently there is two primary processes and they both can produce a diamond in 2-4 weeks. This is what it says about the High Pressure, High Temperature method: This method mimics the natural process by exposing carbon to extremely high pressure and temperature in a containment unit. Hmmmm. So why is it that only a laboratory can create those conditions, but in nature it would have to take billions of years.

Our kids and teens are being inundated with a lie so grievous that it twists the way we are meant to frame how we understand our existence and what story we are a part of.

So, against that godless narrative, I am going to argue that God has given us a prototype garden to show us what being in His story looks like. What taking dominion on His behalf is like.

Now because sin entered the world, even the word dominion is hard for us to understand. But it is essential that we understand that we are not parasites on the planet. That the planet is doomed by the existence of humanity and the earth can only support a very minimal amount of people. God is a God of abundance, it is our mission to take His goodness through the whole earth.

He renewed this with Noah in Genesis 9.

With Abraham – all the nations of the earth will be blessed through you.

And again with Jesus' followers in

Matthew 28:16-20

[16] Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. [17] And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. [18] And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

God has given us a mission. It is a mission that is infinite in its value and eternal in its scope. It will outlive us. The mission or story that our teens believe themselves to be a part of will radically shape the lives they live. We can't out entertain the world, and we can't out stimulate drugs, porn, or other addictive stimulants. Our project is not to out compete those things but to come along side and help them see that they are accepting a cheap counterfeit of what they were truly created for.

So, how do we practically walk this forward. We are going to get a bunch of great stuff this weekend so maybe some coaching advice will help.

Our pastor used to be a teacher in a Public school north of Saskatoon. When he began coaching he would tend to pull a player aside and give him a run down on all the ways he could improve his game. This wasn't a very successful Technique. He discovered that if he could help a player improve one thing, then success would build on success.

We can have a tendency to want to fix everything at once, but instead, by the end of this weekend, make sure you can identify one thing that if you really did it well, you know it would make a difference.

This can also be our approach to helping the teens in our lives. What's the one thing, that if we could identify that and see real change, it would truly make a notable difference. Then, we can help with the next, and the next.

So, what has God put in our hands to do this?

Build relationships in whatever way you can. TJ will share more with us tomorrow about this. It can be as simple as warmly greeting and engaging in small talk with a teen that serves you at the restaurant, grocery store, or subway.

Volunteer for youth group or drop in centre. Even if it is just bringing snack and hanging out. And on this note, don't assume the church kids are okay. One of the youth I worked with who came from a solid home, I would have never guessed had any significant challenges.

He expressed gratitude to me a couple years after he was done high school, saying he wasn't sure where he would be if it wasn't for me. I really didn't do anything significant in my mind, but I was there as a consistent affirmation of who he was created to be.

Attachment slides:

Here is a bit of a frame work to understand the importance of deeper relationships with teens who by in large are leaning away from adult relationships and attachments and toward teen attachments

The deeper the relationship, the greater influence you can have. If a youth gives you permission to really engage with them, here is a framework to help them move forward from a current place of struggle to more of what God would have for them:

Slides: Current Reality to Desired Future

Your either part of the problem, or part of the solution!

Let's shine the light of the Gospel, and the hope of our risen Lord into every dark recess:

First our own hearts.

Then our homes.

Then our Churches.

Then our Communities.

Then to the nation and the uttermost parts of the earth.

Its Christ or chaos

Let us live out, All of Christ for All of Life.

Ending Prayer, because you prayed, Page 43

