****

**Key Scriptures:** Hebrews 12:1-2, Habakkuk 2:2-3, Genesis 30:25-43

**Takeaway:** Vision is what guides our future and it’s worth protecting.

**INTRO**

I don’t know about you but I feel great about this year. There’s something fresh and energizing about a new school year. It may feel like all the failures from last year are behind us and now we’ve got a blank canvas to make something amazing. Maybe you don’t really care about the academic side of things but you do have your eye on the prize when it comes to sports or performing on stage. That’s why I feel like this is your year.

So, for the next three weeks I want to break down how we can partner with you to make this the best year possible. Do you all agree with me on that? Is this your year? I want you to tell someone next to you, “This is your year.”

**FAILURES OF LAST YEAR**

Sometimes you have to say it out loud to really believe it. Maybe the failures of last year can make it hard to believe that this year is any different, but I want you to know that this year is full of potential. I hope some of you already have a goal in mind that you want to accomplish. It may be the starting position on the team or the lead role in a play. Some of you have a college in mind that you want to get into, and I want you to know that it’s all possible. But there’s just one thing that’s holding each and every one of us back from accomplishing our goals.

I think the reason why we never accomplish our dreams is because we never really have the right vision for them. Now you might be on the defense about not having vision for your dreams. You might be thinking, “But I know what I want to do! I know what I want to accomplish.” But knowing what you want to accomplish isn’t really vision. That’s called a desire. There are hundreds of things that I desire to do, but I rarely accomplish any of them.

Am I bumming anyone out yet? When I say vision I’m not talking about a desire for something to happen. I’m talking about a goal that you’ve written down and all the steps that you need to take to accomplish that goal. I’m talking about a mission that you strive for every day through practice and learning. I can dream of becoming the next Lebron James, but if I never pick up a basketball, then it will never happen. **Vision *is the art of knowing where you want to go and planning the steps that you need to take to get there, and then following through.***

Let me illustrate this further with a story. There was a young comedian who went to Hollywood to try and make it. Every day he faced rejection in every audition he went to. He was living out of his car, eating scraps to keep himself alive. A normal person would have given up on their dreams and gone back home. But this comedian kept chasing his dreams. Every night he would drive his car to the Hollywood Hills where he slept. He would survey the city filled with more talented actors than he, and he would pull out a check he had written for himself. The check was made out for 10 million dollars. Sounds ambitious right? He even post-dated it to be cashed in 10 years and in the memo line he put “for acting services rendered.”

This guy knew that he wasn’t going to quit as long as he had this check staring him in the face. He even had a timeline of 10 years and an amount that would determine his success. In the bottom right corner, he signed his name: Jim Carrey.

Jim Carrey went on to be one of the most successful comedic actors of our time and today he has a net worth of over $150 million. Jim Carrey had a vision that kept him anchored through all his failure. Vision is key to every success story. Vision is the key to making this your year.

“Write this. Write what you see. Write it out in big block letters so that it can be read on the run. This vision-message is a witness pointing to what’s coming. It aches for the coming—it can hardly wait! And it doesn’t lie. If it seems slow in coming, wait. It’s on its way. It will come right on time.

**Habakkuk 2:2-3 MSG Version**

I love what the author in Habakkuk says about vision. Write your vision where you can see it. Use a dry erase marker and write your goal on your bathroom mirror so it stares at you when you get ready for school. That way, every day you know the direction that you need to run. It’s in this constant reminder that you have a mission so that you know you have a purpose.

The author goes on to say our vision points us to what’s coming. And even when you fail and your success is nowhere in sight, it’s coming. If you want to accomplish your goals this year then you have to ask yourself this, “What is my vision this year, and what am I doing to accomplish it?”

**COUNTING SHEEP**

But it’s not enough to just know what you want to do with this year. Writing your vision in plain sight is a great start but there’s so much more to accomplishing your goals. So, let me just unlock how vision can radically change your life by showing you how it changed the life of a man named Jacob.

To give you some backstory about Jacob, he was in a tricky situation in Genesis 30. He wanted to marry the woman of his dreams, Rachel, and so he worked seven-years to earn her hand in marriage. Most of you guys can barely work up the nerve to ask a girl out in person. Snapchat is a weird way to date, just saying. So, after working for seven-years for his bride, her father, Laban, got Jacob drunk on his wedding night! The next morning Jacob woke up in bed next to Rachel’s sister, Leah, not Rachel.

Jacob was tricked into marrying the slightly less beautiful sister. Jacob was furious and I think we can agree that he should have been. So, Laban struck up a deal with Jacob. He said that he’d let Jacob marry Rachel right away, if he agreed to stay married to Leah, and to work seven more years for him. Jacob reluctantly agreed, and now he had two wives and was stuck working seven more years for a con-artist as a father-in-law. You can be sure those were seven awkward family Thanksgiving dinners.

That’s where we find Jacob in Genesis 30. The seven years were up and so Jacob told Laban, “I want to go to my home country and I’m taking my wives and children with me.” He told Laban that God has blessed Laban’s cattle and his riches because Jacob had been there. Laban had been made prosperous because Jacob’s God loves him so much, so he had been nothing but a blessing to Laban.

Jacob knew that Laban is a con-artist so he made a deal with him. Normally Laban would give a huge amount of his herd away as a wedding gift for his two daughters, but Jacob knew that Laban would try to trick his way out of it. So, Jacob made a deal with Laban.

He told Laban, “Let me go through your flock of sheep after this mating season and take any sheep for myself that is speckled or spotted or black. But all of the pure white sheep will be yours.” This was a crazy request because there are way more pure white sheep than spotted and black sheep. So, Jacob would taking a fraction of what he deserved.

Laban agreed to those terms, and to make sure Jacob’s sheep wouldn’t multiply, he took all the male spotted and black sheep and put them with one herd, and he took the females and puts them with another herd. Laban had made it impossible for Jacob’s sheep to multiply because sheep will only go after sheep that look like themselves. Jacob should have been furious by this move. He should have feel cheated by what Laban had done. But instead, he created a plan and this is where the power of vision will totally change your life entirely. If you can catch what Jacob did, it will make you one of the most successful people in this room.

Jacob went out to where his male sheep were kept with Laban’s and he took out his pocket knife out and he peeled branches until they were bone white. Then, he put the white sticks in the watering places of his male sheep so every time they went to drink, all they saw was white. And then for his female sheep that were being kept with Laban’s, he did the same thing, only this time he makes the sticks spotted and speckled. So, when Laban’s male sheep went to drink, all they saw was spots.

Jacob was casting vision for two separate sheep. He as reprogramming these sheep to go against their very nature of breeding. Normally they would only breed with sheep of the same color because that’s all they could see, but now his sheep are seeing pure white all the time, and Laban’s sheep were seeing only spots wherever they go. So, when mating season came, Laban’s plan backfired completely. Jacob’s male sheep would only breeding with Laban’s female sheep, and Laban’s male sheep would only breed with Jacob’s female sheep.

But here’s where Jacob took this idea of vision even further. When the weaker and sicker sheep tried to mate with his sheep, he herded them away and he only let the strong sheep breed with his sheep. So, here’s what happened when Laban came to check on the herd when the ewes were giving birth. All of Jacob’s female sheep were miraculously giving birth to strong speckled lambs, even though Laban had made it impossible for it to happen. And all of Laban’s pure white females were giving birth to speckled and black lambs. Laban was in disbelief. Just to make things worse for Laban, the only pure white sheep being born were the ones that came from his weak and sick male sheep.

**APPLICATION**

So, Jacob was looking at what would seem an impossible outcome, and yet he’s walked away with a giant herd of spotted black sheep, and Laban’s sheep had barely multiplied and the lambs that he had were so weak and sickly that they were worthless.

If you missed what happened, let me break it down for you with two secrets to vision. **Secret Number One:** Vision must constantly be practiced and seen. Vision is what makes impossible circumstances seem possible. Even in the face of failure we can rewire ourselves to strive for something amazing. That’s what Jacob did with the sticks he peeled and put around all the herd. He programmed the sheep to go against their natural tendencies.

**Secret Number Two:** Vision must only be trusted with the strong. Practice doesn’t make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect. Jacob only trusted the strong sheep with his vision. He didn’t want the sick and the weak to go near his herd. Because of this, only strong sheep were born. How many of you want weak people to help you with your dreams? Who are you trusting with your vision? Is it the friend that has no ambition? Or are you seeking to hang out with people that are more passionate than you? Vision must be protected and given to those that you can trust. Strong success comes from trusting strong people. When I want to start something amazing and life giving, I don’t invite weak people to be a part of it. I only trust strong leaders that will push me and make me better. When the strong are trusted with vision, big results will follow.

Do you have a vision for your life? Have you written it down where you can see it every day? Who are you sharing that vision with? I can guarantee that you will fail if you give it to the wrong people. Let me take this one step further.

1Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. **Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV**

In this passage, the author of Hebrews tells us that if we want to make it far, we have to look to Jesus as our vision. You don’t have to be a believer to understand and apply vision to your life. You don’t have to be a Christian in order to be successful, but tonight I want to be real with you. We’re being told to look to Jesus as our vision for a very important reason. Jesus’ only mission on earth was to represent a very real God who loved you so much that He would do anything to save you from the heartache of this world and an eternity without Him.

In order for God to be able to reach you and save you, Jesus had to do the impossible. He had to surrender His life and it took the form of being nailed to the cross. It’s in this act of sacrifice that Jesus paid a price for our sins. Because we were disconnected from God we would spend an eternity in place filled with hatred and loneliness.

But Jesus accomplished the impossible and Hebrews tells us that He had a vision that allowed Him to endure it all. It says, “who for the joy that was set before him.” There was a joy set before Him and that joy was His vision. That joy was you. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, you were on His mind, you were His joy.

I believe vision is crucial to being successful in every area of life, but even more so on this spiritual matter. You were the vision set before Jesus. Is Jesus your vision? When you hear about Jesus do you look at Him and see love and acceptance? Because that’s what He’s offering you. You may have heard some Christians say that God is angry at you and that He doesn’t want you, but that couldn’t be further from the truth.

When you look to Jesus, do you see the love that He’s offering? Because if you don’t I want to challenge you. Test Jesus as your vision. Surround yourself with everything you can find out about Him. See if He’s worth trusting with your life because the reality is, He wants you and He wants to see you live the most amazing life imaginable. Jesus is worth trusting with your life. You might be wondering how you can learn more and asking, how do I surround myself with this idea of Jesus? Start by coming here. Come check us out every week and learn a new aspect of how God wants you. It’s one thing to make this year your best year, and next week I want to give you another practical way making this year great. But what if we trusted God with our eternity? Will you think about that this week? Will you consider trusting Jesus?