CHAPTER ONE

Keep Your Vision in Front of You
A young man dreamed of being an actor, but in the early 1980s, he wasn’t getting the big parts he wanted. Broke and discouraged, he drove his beat-up old car to the top of a hill overlooking the city of Los Angeles and did something unusual. He wrote himself a check for ten million dollars for “Acting services rendered.”

This young man had grown up so poor his family lived in a Volkswagen van at one time. He put that check in his wallet and kept it there. When things got tough, he’d pull it out and look at it to remind himself of his dream.

A dozen years later, that same young man, the comedian Jim Carrey, was making fifteen million to twenty-five million a movie.

Studies tell us that we move toward what we consistently see. You should keep something in front of you, even if it’s symbolic, to remind you of what you are believing for. A businessman I met had a goal to build a new office for his company. He bought a brick, the same type of brick he wanted to use on his building. He keeps that brick on his desk.

Every time he sees it, he’s moving toward his goal. It reminds him of what he’s dreaming about. If you’re single and you want to get married, put an empty photo album on your table. That’s where you’re going to put your wedding photos. When you see it, you’re moving toward it.

You may not be reaching your highest potential, not because you don’t have the faith, the talent, or the determination, but because you’re not keeping the right things in front of you. All over your house, you should have pictures that inspire you, scripture verses that encourage you, mementoes that strengthen your faith. Maybe one of them is a key on your key ring for the new house you want to buy.

If somebody asks, “What’s this extra key for?”
You say, “It is for the house that’s on the way.”

God will finish what He started

In the scripture, Zerubbabel wanted to rebuild the temple. He laid the foundation, but then the people came against him and made him stop. For ten years no work was done. One day the prophet Zechariah came by and told him to do something interesting. He said, “Go get the headstone.” The headstone was the stone reserved to be the last piece of stone that went into the building. It was symbolic. It represented the finished product.

Why was it important for Zerubbabel to keep the headstone in front of him? Because every time he looked at the headstone, it was a reminder that God would finish what He started. When Zerubbabel was discouraged, when he was tired and thought it was impossible to finish the job, he would go over and look at the headstone. That was God saying to him, “I’m in control, I’m going to bring it to pass, just stay in faith.”

Let me ask you: Do you have your headstone in front of you? Do you have something that represents the final piece to your dreams? My brother-in-law Kevin is a twin. Growing up, he loved having a twin sister. His dream was always to have twins. He and my sister Lisa tried to have a baby for a long time with no success. Lisa went through all the fertility treatments, including several surgeries, but still nothing.

They were very discouraged; it didn’t look like it would ever happen. One day Kevin went out to get the mail, and there was a small package in the mailbox. The return address said it had come from Huggies. They hadn’t ordered anything from Huggies. He opened it up and there were two diapers in it. They were
sending out samples of their diapers as part of a promotion.

Kevin could have thrown away the package, thinking, “I don’t need these—we don’t have any children.” But when he saw those two diapers something came alive on the inside. He took that as a sign from God. That was his headstone. He ran in and told Lisa, “We just got the first diapers for our babies.”

He wrote the date on those diapers and placed them on his desk at home. Month after month, he would see those diapers: in the morning before work, in the afternoon after coming home, and in the evening before he went to bed. When you see something long enough it gets into your subconscious mind. It eventually drops down into your spirit. That’s when you know it’s going to happen.

Several years later Kevin and Lisa received a phone call out of the blue asking if they would be interested in adopting a baby. They said, “Yes we would.” The lady said, “How about adopting two? These are twin girls who are about to be born.” Today Kevin and Lisa have their twins. They are teenagers now and as beautiful as can be.

Keep your vision in front of you

Are you believing for a child? Go buy a baby’s outfit and hang it in your closet where you can see it every day. Keep your vision in front of you. A friend of mine who wanted a child decorated her whole baby’s room, bought the bed and the stroller, spent all this time, money, and energy.

Her friends thought she was a little far out, preparing a baby’s room with no baby on the way. But she understood this principle: What you keep in front of you, you are moving toward. A year went by and still no baby. Two years, no baby. Five years. Ten years.

She didn’t get discouraged. She kept thanking God that her baby was on the way. All through the day when she’d walk by that baby’s room, the seed was growing. It didn’t look like anything was happening, but she was moving toward it. Twenty years later she had not one baby, but two. The stroller didn’t work. The bed was out of date. She didn’t care. She had her babies!

Is there something you see every day that reminds you of what you’re believing for, something that inspires you, ignites your faith? Proverbs says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” With no vision you’ll get stuck. That’s why many people have lost their passion. They don’t have anything that reminds them of what they’re dreaming about. If you’re believing to move into a nicer house, find a picture of a house you like and put it on your bathroom mirror. Let that seed get into you.

If you’re believing to get into a college, go buy the school’s T-shirt and wear it around. Put the coffee mug with their logo on your counter. Every time you see that picture, that T-shirt, that baby’s outfit, say under your breath: “Thank You, Lord, for bringing my dreams to pass. Thank You, Lord, that I’ll become everything You created me to be.”

I learned this from my father. He and my mother started Lakewood Church in 1959, in an old rundown feed store. They had ninety people. You know what my father called the church? Lakewood International Outreach Center.

There was a big blue sign outside. The sign cost more than the building. The truth is, they weren’t an international outreach center. They were a small neighborhood church with ninety people. But every time my father drove up to that church and saw the sign, his vision was being increased. He was moving toward it.

When the ninety members saw the sign week after week, something was being birthed on the inside.
Seeds of increase were taking root. Do you know what Lakewood is today? It is an international outreach center touching the world. Growing up, my father always kept a globe on his desk at home. At the old church there was a big world map on the wall. He put a globe behind him when he spoke. He always had the world on his mind. One year at the conference, people came from 150 countries. It looked like the United Nations.

What you keep in front of you, you’re moving toward.

Release your faith in a big way

Now, don’t have just a little vision. You’re not inconveniencing God to believe big. In fact, it’s just the opposite. When you believe to do great things, when you believe to set a new standard for your family, it pleases God.

Take the limits off and say, “I don’t see a way, but God, I know You have a way, so I’m going to believe to have these twins. I will believe to start a business to impact the world. I will believe that my whole family will serve you. I will believe to get totally well.”

When you release your faith in a big way it pleases God. My father could have put on that sign just Lakewood community church. Nothing wrong with that, but God had put something bigger in his heart. He could have looked at the circumstances: “We’re just ninety people. We don’t have a lot of money. We don’t have a nice building. We’ll never do anything great.” If he’d done that, we wouldn’t be such a big church today.

It doesn’t matter what it looks like in the natural; God is a supernatural God. He’s not limited by your resources, by your environment, by your education, by your nationality. If you’ll have a big vision, God will not only do what you’re dreaming about, He will do more than you can ask or think.

A few years after my father went to be with the Lord and I stepped up to pastor the church, I had a desire to write a book. My dad had written many books, and they were all translated into Spanish. On the bookshelf I walk by at home every day, I had two copies of my dad’s most popular book. One was in English. The other was in Spanish. I kept those books in front of me, knowing one day at the right time I would write a book. My dream was that it, too, would be translated into Spanish.

In my mind this seemed so far out. I never thought I could get up and minister, much less write a book. This was stretching my faith. A year went by, no book. Two years, three years, four years. It would have been easy to lose my passion and think it was never going to happen. But I had my father’s books strategically placed on this bookshelf right outside my closet.

To get to the other parts of the house I had to go right by those two books. I saw them thousands and thousands of times. I didn’t always consciously think about them, but even subconsciously I was moving toward writing my own. My faith was being released. Something on the inside was saying, “Yes, one day I’m going to write a book.”

In 2004 I wrote my first book, Your Best Life Now. When the publisher read the manuscript they decided to publish it in English and Spanish at the same time. Normally they wait to see if anybody buys it first. But that’s the way God is. His dream for your life is bigger than your own.
God will supersize your vision

I’ve found that whatever your vision is, God will supersize it. He will do more than you can ask or think. My vision was that my book would be so well received it would be translated into Spanish. But it was also translated into French, German, Russian, Swahili, Portuguese, and more than forty other languages.

If you keep the vision in front of you and don’t get talked out of it, but just keep honoring God, being your best, thanking Him that it’s on the way, God will supersize whatever you’re believing for. He’ll do exceedingly abundantly above and beyond.

I saw an article in the paper several years ago about a man who gave a university one hundred million dollars. I cut that article out and put it on my desk. Every time I see it I say, “God, you did it for a university, you can do it for a ministry.”

I’ve got a big vision. We can reach a lot of people with an extra one hundred million. If you can accomplish your dreams in your own strength, talent, ability, and resources, then your dreams are too small. You don’t need God’s help with small dreams. Believe big. Your destiny is too great, your assignment too important, to have little goals, little dreams, little prayers.

Keep big things in front of you. A friend of mine feeds a million children a day. He and his wife support orphanages and feeding programs that touch a million kids every day. That’s what I keep in front of me. “God, You did it for them, You can do it for us. Let our family impact millions of children.”

In our kitchen at home, we have pictures of some of the children we sponsor through our partner World Vision. Every time we eat dinner, every time we pass by, we say, “God, let us make a bigger difference.”

We’re moving toward it. You may say, “Well, Joel, I can’t even imagine that happening to me. I can’t imagine me being that blessed.” Don’t worry—you won’t be. If you don’t have a vision for it, it’s not going to happen. Without a vision you won’t see God’s best. You won’t be the winner He wants you to be.

Use the power of your imagination

I know some things do seem far out or very unlikely, but don’t ever say: “I can’t imagine that.” You see somebody really fit and energetic when you’re trying to get back in shape, you may think: “I can’t imagine looking like that.” You may drive by a nice house and say, “I can’t imagine living in this neighborhood.” Or you may have thought: “I can’t imagine publishing a book.” “I can’t imagine owning my own business.” “I can’t imagine being that successful.”

The problem is you’re being limited by your own imagination. You’ve got to change what you’re seeing. Don’t let negative thoughts paint those pictures. Use your imagination to see yourself accomplishing dreams, rising higher, overcoming obstacles, being healthy, strong, blessed, and prosperous.

I don’t say this arrogantly, but I can imagine my books being published in every language, I can imagine somebody handing us that one-hundred-million-dollar check. I can imagine us feeding a million children a day. I can imagine living a long, healthy life. I can imagine my children superseding anything we’ve done.

Not only that, I can imagine you fulfilling your dreams. I can imagine you totally out of debt. I can imagine you healthy and strong. I can imagine you leading your company. I can imagine you blessing the world, being a history maker, setting a new standard for your family. Now I’m asking you not only to have
it in your imagination, but to also keep something in front of you that reminds you of it. A man I know works in the oil business. He started his company with just himself and one assistant. It grew and grew. He’s always at our services, honoring God, giving, serving, and helping others. His company specializes in drilling for oil. He provides the crew and all the equipment. He was spending all his time traveling around checking on the different sites.

One day he saw a competitor’s employees boarding their own airplane. They were doing what he did in a fraction of the time. God dropped that dream in his heart, that he could have an airplane. This was so far out for him. He came from a family that lived paycheck to paycheck, barely getting by. He’d already broken out of the mold.

When his family members heard him talking about having an airplane, they thought he had lost his mind. They couldn’t imagine it, but he could. Sometimes your family will not be your biggest cheerleader. They may not encourage you. You’ve got to listen to what God’s telling you and not to what other people may tell you. People will try to talk you out of the dream in your heart.

My friend went out and bought a model of the airplane he wanted and put it on his desk. People would come into his office and ask, “What’s that plane for?” He would tell them, “That’s my airplane. That’s what I’m going to use to travel the country.”

Year after year he kept that plane in front of him. One day the competitor that he’d seen flying around walked into his office. The older gentleman said, “I’m retiring. I’d like to sell you my airplane.”

This man had a big, beautiful plane that could seat twelve people. My friend couldn’t afford it. He was hoping to buy a little, used two-seater plane. He said, “I appreciate the offer, but I don’t have those kinds of funds.”

The competitor said, “Sure you do. You don’t have to put any money down, just take over my monthly payments, and you can have the plane.”

My friend got that big, beautiful plane for a fraction of the value, and today he flies all over the world. His company has taken off. He said, “Joel, God has done more than I ever imagined.”

When you keep your vision in front of you, that’s your faith being released. That’s why the scripture uses such strong language that says people perish for lack of vision. That means dreams die when you don’t have vision. If you can’t see what God has put in your heart, then you’ll miss the incredible things God wants to do.

Now, you may not need an airplane, but you may need to lose thirty pounds. Why don’t you put up a picture of yourself thirty pounds lighter on your bathroom mirror? Every day when you see it, don’t get depressed and think, “I wish I still looked like that. I wish I could fit into that dress.”

Instead say, “Lord, thank you that I’m losing this weight. I’m healthy, whole, strong, in shape, energetic, attractive.” Let that new image take root.

You may not be healthy today, but you need to keep something in front of you that says you’re going to be healthy. Put up pictures of yourself when you were healthy and strong all over your house. Put up scripture verses; plan to take some trips to see your family. Check on that gym you want to join.

Don’t you dare plan on dying. We need you, so plan on living. Keep the right vision in front of you. You can. You will!

In the scripture, God promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. In the natural it was impossible. Abraham didn’t have one child. He was eighty years old. But God didn’t just give him the promise; God gave him a picture to look at.

God said, “Abraham, go out and look at the stars—that’s how many descendants you will have.” I’ve read where there are six thousand stars in the Eastern sky where he was. It’s not a coincidence that there are six thousand promises in the scripture. God was saying, “Every promise that you can get a vision for, I
will bring it to pass.”

God told him also to look at the grains of sand at the seashore, because that was how many relatives he would have. Why did God give him a picture? God knew there would be times when it would look as if the promise would not come to pass, and Abraham would be discouraged and tempted to give up.

In those times, Abraham would go out at night and look up at the sky. When he saw the stars, faith would rise in his heart. Something would tell him, “It’s going to happen, I can see it.”

In the morning when his thoughts told him, “You’re too old, it’s too late, you heard God wrong,” he would go down to the beach and look at the grains of sand. His faith would be restored.

Like Abraham, there will be times when it seems as if your dreams are not coming to pass. It’s taking so long. The medical report doesn’t look good. You don’t have the resources. Business is slow. You could easily give up.

But like Abraham, you’ve got to go back to that picture. Keep that vision in front of you. When you see the key to your new house, the outfit for your baby, the tennis shoes for when you’re healthy, the picture frame for your spouse, the article inspiring you to build an orphanage, those pictures of what you’re dreaming about will keep you encouraged.

God is saying to you what He said to Abraham: “If you can see it, then I can do it. If you have a vision for it, then I can make a way. I can open up new doors. I can bring the right people. I can give you the finances. I can break the chains holding you back.”

Your dreams will fall into place

I read about a man named Conrad Hilton. He was the founder of the Hilton hotels. As a young man back in the 1930s, he saw an article about the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City. The title of the article said it was the most famous hotel in the world. The article included big, beautiful pictures.

He’d never seen anything like that hotel. It was so grand, so magnificent. As he was reading the article, God put the dream in his heart to one day own that hotel. In the natural, it didn’t seem possible. He could barely pay his rent. He didn’t have any connections. The Depression was just ending.

Conrad Hilton could have said, “God, you have the wrong person, not me.” Instead, he dared to let the seed take root. He cut out the picture of the big, beautiful Waldorf and put it under the glass on his desk. Every day he would see that picture for one year, two years, five years, ten years.

It did not look like his dream would happen, but he kept that vision in front of him. When he went to New York City, he walked around the Waldorf Astoria Hotel and prayed. He thanked God that it was his—but he did not tell anyone; he just let the dream take root.

Eighteen years later, his company was able to purchase nearly 250,000 shares of the Waldorf Corporation, and with that deal, he owned the most famous hotel in the world. Friends, what you keep in front of you, you’re moving toward.

You may think it’s too late—your dreams are too big, your obstacles too difficult—but God is still on the throne. He still has a way to bring them to pass. Just like with Mr. Hilton, God will do something big in your life. He will release His favor in a new way.

What you thought was over and done is still going to happen. When it looks impossible, like it’s way over your head, God will suddenly cause things to fall into place, giving you favor, influence, and connections.
Don't stop believing. Every time you see your vision, you’re moving toward it. Thank God that it's on the way. If you’ll do this God will supersize what you’re dreaming about. He will take you further faster, opening doors that no man can shut, doing what medicine cannot do.

I believe and declare that every dream, every promise, every goal God put in your heart, He will bring to pass.