

## VISION IN ACTION: A DAY WITH DANITA'S KIDS

*“The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision.”*

Helen Keller

*“Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. Vision with action can change the world.”*

Joel A. Barker

*“When God is seemingly conspiring against us, we do not always have the spiritual discernment to realize that, despite the pain involved, He is at the very center of it all. He is maturing us in the process.”*

Richard Gibbons<sup>1</sup>

For some reason, God communicates His most useful truths to me during long trips. That is certainly the case for recent insights on *vision*.

As many of you know, I've just returned home from an almost 3,000-mile drive to Ohio, Missouri, South Carolina and North Carolina. In Ohio, I took care of some paperwork relating to mom's funeral, sat in on a VA virtual vetting session for my dad, and spent time with my sisters (including watching Jim Carey's *The Grinch* at a restored theater in Miamisburg, where—interestingly enough—I watched my first movie as a kid). Then it was on to the College of the Ozarks (CofO) near Branson, Missouri, to honor a special request.

As much as I love travel, and the handful of truly unique experiences along the way, I am glad to be back home.

But the most important thing that happened during the long trip was my special encounter with the meaning of *vision*.

It all started with a unique experience occurring during the opening minutes of the trip.

As I was driving out of our apartment complex, I noticed a car driving in the wrong direction on the street directly in front of our apartment. The car had a big dent in the side. I mean, like a *huge* dent. An elderly woman in an Arab-style headdress was driving. She proceeded to a place where the traffic island ended, turned, and proceeded to drive the wrong way going the opposite direction. Really

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<sup>1</sup> As I was mulling over this missive on my latest trip, my good friend Rachel Mullinax gave me a book to read by her pastor, Richard Gibbons. The book, *Conspiracy Theory: When God is Seemingly Against Us*, (Christian Focus, Glasgow, 2021), was an absolute Godsend and spoke volumes to me about the topic of Vision. Quote is from page 45.

weird. The driver was either disoriented, confused, impaired, just didn't care or had learned to drive in a Commonwealth country.

I looked on in amazement.

A couple other drivers pulled over to the side of the road to avoid a head-on collision.

I have found over the years that these unusual events often carry deeper meanings. This was no exception. The scene unfolding before me was so extraordinary that I asked God what—if anything—was its broader spiritual meaning.

The answer (sort of like the event itself) caught me by surprise. I'm really not sure what I expected to hear. But suddenly I realized that many of my friends—just like the driver I was observing—are going the wrong direction in life. They are just as oblivious as the driver. Moreover, we also live in a country and culture that is moving headlong, and rapidly, in the wrong direction. Indeed, some have been moving in the wrong moral and spiritual direction for so long that they have convinced themselves they actually are heading in the right direction.

I thought about the many years of drift in my own life and how often I had traveled in the wrong direction myself.

“Why is this happening?” I asked.

“There is a lack of *vision* in the land,” was the reply.

*Vision?*

Really?

But what is *vision*?

Then I asked the Lord to show me the meaning of *vision* in the days ahead. And He did.

For the purposes of this missive, we'll define *vision* as a God-inspired, vivid, imaginative conception or anticipation.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, it was no accident that Danita Estrella Watts asked me to meet her and her husband on the CofO campus, near Branson, Missouri. It was a timely invitation: I definitely needed my spiritual batteries recharged after mom's death. Moreover, in my experience, Danita is the person that best personifies the definition of *vision* mentioned above. She is the founder and spiritual guiding force of an organization called “Danita's Children,” located on a beautiful campus in the Haitian city of Ouanaminthe, near the border of the Dominican Republic.

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<sup>2</sup> In the Hebrew language, the concept is rendered as *hazon* and conveys something more than what is seen with our eyes; it refers to a type of vision that comes from God, which is revealed by Him and His Word (revelatory knowledge). The Chinese character couplet for vision, insight and foresight (the perceptual capacity to gain an accurate and deep understanding of something) is yan guang, from the characters for eye and light.

Danita was one of three women described in my missive earlier this year entitled “Three Little Women” (along with Dr. June Buchanan and my mom).

She is one of the few people in my life I would drive halfway across the country to meet.

The reason Danita asked me to join her was to celebrate Christmas with six of her “children” now attending the college. (Luckenson—the first of Danita’s kids to attend CofO, now married and studying engineering—his brother Ederson, Esai, Nehemie, Katiana, and Daphney). None of the students would be able to return to Haiti for Christmas and “Momma Danita” (along with her husband John) wanted to spend time with them.

Why was I invited to share in the occasion? During the time I was a visiting professor at CofO, I played a small role (as part of a non-profit organization headed by Pastor Charles Ikutiminu) in making that possible. With the blessing of CofO President Dr. Jerry Davis—another true visionary—a team from campus visited Danita’s campus in Haiti and the flow of students to CofO began shortly thereafter.

The visit to Danita’s campus was one of my life’s most unforgettable experiences.

As I have noted in other writings, Danita is very small in stature. But true *vision* is not based on outward appearances but rather what God sees in one’s heart. Danita speaks with a quiet, almost mouse-like, voice. She is content to let others tell her story for her. She doesn’t like to shine the light of attention on herself. It’s a genuine modesty. That’s what makes her so special. Everything she has accomplished, she told me during our campus visit, is all due to God.

That is the first and most fundamental principle of *vision*. To be effective, and world changing, it must be grounded and firmly rooted in a relationship with Jesus Christ. I have met many individuals over the years who have fantastic ideas on how to change the society and world around them. But they are rooted in human-based imagination, skills and intentions. Notable as they may be from a worldly perspective, they are limited by human abilities and, in the end, will fall prey to human flaws.

Observing Danita’s *vision* over the years, it has been consistently protected, nurtured and prospered by God. As I wrote in a book I gave to Danita and John: “Momma Danita—may your vision continue to stretch the imagination of God.”

Amen.

How does it work? Danita is the living embodiment of the power of a God-given vision. In the very early days of her orphanage, a journalist from *Charisma* magazine heard about Danita’s story and visited her in Haiti. The rent on the house where she housed the children was due: during the interview, Danita and the writer shared a dinner of spam with candles on the boxes that served as a table. But her

vision burned within her: “God is going to build a hospital there, a church there, dormitories for the children there,” Danita said gesturing with her arms.

The writer could see nothing but an empty field. And that field didn’t even belong to Danita.

Yet.

Today, that same piece of land is where Danita’s campus is located, housing an orphanage, hospital, church, several dormitories and an administration building—all built without debt—which feeds, shelters and provides spiritual guidance for local children in northeastern Haiti.<sup>3</sup>

Faith is the fertile soil in which a *vision* is planted and grows.

A second principle of *vision*: God hovers over a true *vision* to protect it. Many years ago, there was a violent revolt in Haiti (similar to the tumult happening in the small country today). Mobs of angry armed men were seeking out white foreigners to kill. Or worse. They came to the town where Danita’s campus is located. Local villagers formed a protective cordon around Danita and the orphanage. “She helps our children,” they shouted out.

The men left.

In more recent days, the ongoing unrest has presented unprecedented challenges for Danita’s campus in Haiti. The campus, for example, is dependent on on-campus generators to make it self-reliant. The generators need fuel. The social and political unrest has disrupted fuel truck deliveries. As a result, fuel was running low. On campus they prayed, and at the eleventh hour—minutes before they would have had to shut off the lights—a fuel truck miraculously arrived.

Only God!

That brings me to a third and final principle of *vision*. If firmly rooted in God, *vision* squeezes out fear or future concerns. Shortly before this latest CofO campus meeting with Danita, I had made several calls to campus to set up meetings between Danita and each of her kids on campus, trying to juggle their busy class and work schedules with Danita’s limited time window.

I wanted everything to work perfectly for Danita’s visit. But the best laid plans oft go astray, as the poet says. I leaned too far out over my skies. There were misunderstandings. I made unfounded assumptions.

I called Danita. “I’m sorry,” I said to Danita, “I think I have messed things up.”

Danita was nonplussed.

She was right.

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<sup>3</sup> For more on Danita’s story, go to the website [danita'schildren.org](http://danita'schildren.org). The ministry is a fertile place to plant seed.

God took over the planning for the visit.

What happened was extraordinary. Despite their busy schedules, all six kids were able to attend a special Christmas dinner at the Keeter Center (again, compliments of Dr. Davis's office; his office also defrayed the costs of staying in the beautiful Keeter Center Lodge on campus). At the dinner, I soaked in the personal accounts and future dreams of each of the kids.

What an amazing group!

After the dinner, we all loaded into two cars to attend a fantastic Christmas show at the Hughes Brothers theater in downtown Branson. The show is one of my personal favorites. All six kids attended and loved it. So did Danita and John. God's favor flowed throughout the evening. The theater even provided t-shirts and popcorn, with drinks, for Danita's kids.

From the dinner to the show, it was a perfect sequence of events. Just what Danita had in mind, she told me later, for the holiday get-together. Danita's *vision* had made a way.

For two days, I was privileged to observe the phenomenon and bask in the extraordinary favor of God. Of course, God works through individuals to accomplish His purpose. Danita's visit was no exception. My special thanks to Mrs. Tamara Schneider in the President's office, Mrs. Sally Hitchcock in the Academic Dean's office, and Mrs. Toni Whitted in the Public Relations office for helping make Danita's visit such a success.

As I pulled out of campus, I thought about what had happened. A valuable truth had interjected itself into my spiritual DNA. It is a part of me now. Despite my best intentions, I had to step aside and let God work—to allow the power of Danita's *vision* to take over. *Vision* will often take a completely different track from what is planned.

I was amazed at what took place.

I became a ringside spectator, an onlooker, of how *vision* unfolds.

What a privilege!

As I drove toward Nashville and ultimately to see my new grandchild Emma in North Carolina, I couldn't help but think: we need more believers like Danita—and the power of their visions—in this troubled world of ours.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

I encourage each of you to trust your *vision* to Jesus Christ during this Christmas season and as we enter an uncertain New Year.