



The Paradigm of Lowlands Vision

Inkyung Sung

(Translated by Oh-Ig Kwoun, edited by brothers and sisters)

I am not ashamed of saying that I am an arsonist. I've been setting fires to the hearts of the young adults, burning up their vision for the last 20 years. Not only I have been using the word of "where there is 'no vision' (or 'no revelation', NIV), the people perish." (Proverb 29:18, KJV), but also the contemporary paradigms of visionary lighters for set fire and prevent my people from perishing.

The popular burning lighters for me were the Vision for Highlands (*gojideron*), the Vision for Unexplored Lands (*midabjiron*) and especially the Vision for No-Vision Lands (*mubijeonjiron*). But I have observed certain limitations and negative aspects of these popular visionary lighters and I also found many young adults often make mistakes about their vision with these paradigms.

Therefore, I would like to share with you my basic understanding of 'ambition, vision and talent' before I give my criticisms of these popular and contemporary lighters of visionary paradigms. Then I suggest you think about my alternative paradigm, the Vision for Lowlands (*jeojideron*) and its practical examples, one from Jesus and two from Koreans.

Ambition, Vision and Talent

Be careful, because there is so many false prophecies about your visions. But Jeremiah warned us a long ago, "This is what the Lord Almighty says: Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord." (Jeremiah 23:16) The first false prophesy is confusion about the ambition and vision, and the second false prophecy is misunderstanding about career, talent and vision.

이 문서는 라브리 웹사이트에서 내려받은 것으로, 개인 및 그룹 공부를 위해서만 인쇄, 복사, 배포 등이 허가되었습니다. 그 밖의 용도로 사용하려면 별도의 허가를 받으시기 바랍니다. 내용은 라브리의 공식 입장과 일치하지 않을 수 있습니다. This document was downloaded from L'Abri Korea. Printing and distribution are permitted only for study purposes. For all other uses, please obtain permission from L'Abri. L'Abri does not endorse the contents of this document.

First, when you think of your vision, you should not be confused between ambition and vision. Today we often misunderstand 'the ambition or dream' by means of 'vision'. The famous slogan, "Boys, be ambitious" by W.S. Clark is often seen as synonymous with "Boys, be visionary." Even Christians often speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. The Bible clearly tells us about the difference between ambition and vision.

Ambition is a dream of your own selfish desire when the ultimate goal of your life simply for your own glory and honor, and the work which can be done by individual action. Right after a visionary dream, Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylon Empire, "made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon."(Daniel 3:1) It was an attempt to unify the religions of his empire by self-deification. Rather than God's will, Nebuchadnezzar's own ambition and selfish goals were "fulfilled" through his visionary dream.

The vision is a special, God-given call for you, your life-long purpose for glorifying God and serving neighbors, and the work which can be fulfilled by a co-operation with others. As the Bible says, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, said God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."(Acts 2:17, KJV)

	Ambition	Vision
Motivation	Dream of selfish desire	God-given call
Purpose	Self-glorification and honor	Glorify God and serve neighbors
Way of fulfillment	By hook or by crook	By good cooperation

Daniel and his friends had a vision to transform Babylonian social systems, as Jews, they didn't wish to take part in the city's food customs. They failed at first, but they tried again and finally succeeded. After a test diet of only vegetables and water, they were "looked healthier and better nourished" than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took agreed to their request, taking away the Babylonian choice food and wine and giving them the vegetables they desired (Daniel 1:15, 16) It was just the beginning of revolutionary transformation. It took at least 37 years to transform some of the Babylonian laws. (Daniel 3:29)

Second, when you think about your vision, you should not confuse your vision and job or

your vision and talents. Neither your job nor your talent could be your vision. You should choose your occupation or career according to talents and gifts the Lord has given you, not according to your own selfish desires or world trends. It is better not to compare your job or talent with others. Simply be satisfied to take the path God has made for you.

Every talent is given by God and we will be called to account for how we used it. Jesus told us: “To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability... After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them.”(Mt. 25:15-19, cf. Eph. 4:7-13, 1Cor. 12; Rom,12)

These Bible verses tell us that talents are given by God and to build up the body of Christ. Jong Chul Kim, former L’Abri worker and now a lawyer pointed out the difference between the nature of the talents in the financial market and talents of Biblical gifts, and designed a nice diagram as follows:

	Talents of financial market	Talents of Biblical gifts
Fundamental Source	Obtain by own effort	Basically entrusted by God
Purpose	Fulfill own needs	Serve God and neighbors
Main Interests	What kind and how many talents do you have?	How do we use talents entrusted to us?

A brief summary about occupation, talent and vision is as follows:

- 1) According to the talents we are given, your occupation except sinful work is a holy, sacred and God-given work. Some Christians commonly misunderstand that only certain occupations – usually religious ones such as clergy or missionary – are holy and sacred. That is not true. This is an ugly effect of dualistic spirituality.
- 2) At the same time, as Os Guinness pointed out in his book “Call,” “you should not misunderstand your occupations as your call or vision, just like the Reformation people made this mistake.” Your occupation is not the same as your call or vision.
- 3) Your occupation is an aim or instrument for fulfilling your life-long ultimate vision. It might be possible that your occupation or job could match your vision well, but they don’t always go together.

William Wilberforce (1759-1833) had a true vision from the Lord to stop the slave trade and its corrupt social system. His papers called ‘A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in This Country, Contrasted with Real

Christianity.’ (1897) and ‘A Royal Proclamation against Crime and Public Immorality’ (1787) clearly tells us that his vision was given by God and based on the Bible. It was fulfilled by him along with John Newton and friends of the Clapham Community. It took 40 years to achieve that goal.

Vision for Highlands

The paradigm of a “Vision for Highlands” is one of the most popular among mainstream of visionary ideas. The “Vision for Highlands” (*gojideron*) calls for a person to reach a top place of leadership where he or she can influence more people more effectively to do work that glorifies God. The “Highlands” are places of higher social status – meaning migrating to big cities, joining the mainstream, becoming opinion leaders, being very successful in one’s career or becoming wealthy – high enough to carry out big projects or influence people on a larger scale. As far as I can tell, this vision is encouraged by so many leaders and especially Rev. DongHo Kim.

To achieve this type of vision, you should try your best or study very hard, working eagerly to excel in society to become a leader or obtain the highest possible status in society. This is ultimately in order to help others and glorify God by exercising influence as a leader. To reach a Highland or to become the best in any field is not easily achievable. However, it is still a place where sinners are yearning for the gospel and where the grace of God needs to be declared. Therefore, I desire any able young Christians to aim to reach their Highlands and exercise their influence to share the Good News and redeem the lost. However, we all know that to become the best in any field is not for everyone. It demands absolute dedication to attain the goal.

A good example of this vision holder was Joseph. His two dreams were a prophetic vision from God for saving his family from severe famine, but his parents and brothers could not understand his vision until it was fulfilled. "Listen to this dream I had ... and I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me. Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" (Genesis 37:6-11) Finally Joseph became ruler of all Egypt and saved not only his family the entire nation from a great famine. Typologically, Joseph is also a good symbol of Jesus Christ, who saved his people from sin.

From the perspective of the Christian worldview, there are several major issues with this paradigm:

1) In the process of pursuing the Highland vision, we inevitably either stretch ourselves beyond our limit, and sacrifice other valuable aspects of our lives, or in this framework, one's dignity is determined by continuously comparing oneself against others instead of just being God's creation.

2) More importantly, the assumption that we can change people by using our power or influence is a dangerous approach, which is not necessarily among the examples Jesus has shown us.

3) Although we cannot discount the value of someone in a leadership position fostering an environment or a system that exercises honesty and truthfulness, Jesus' approach is to serve, to love, and to sacrifice rather than to govern.

Vision for Unexplored Lands

The paradigm of the "Vision for Unexplored lands" (*midabjiron*) is a vision to contribute to society and ultimately the Kingdom of God by pioneering and venturing out into a new field where no one has gone before. It generally means to explore uncharted land, to try out tasks no one has done before, and to take the challenge of working in a field that the rest of the world is not interested in; once again the ultimate goal would be to help others and glorify God by successfully completing this adventure. As far as I heard, this vision is much encouraged by Mr. ByungGu Hwang.

Surely, like a venture business or 'the Blue Ocean' today, cultivating unexplored lands is as precious as reaching the Highlands. But I would dare to say that roads to unexplored lands are readily established in most cases. To navigate unexplored lands, you have to dig your own way out, but there is no guarantee of success. It is much more difficult and painful compared to the other alternatives. It demands absolute dedication to attain the goal. Regardless, I genuinely desire that many of you would be willing to invest tons of years of your life to find your own unexplored lands.

A good example of this vision is Caleb and Jabez. Caleb asked Joshua that "Give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day...I will drive them out just as he said."(Joshua 14:12) Caleb tried his best to achieve the goal and he took the hill. Jabez cried out to the God of Israel saying "oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain." And God granted his request. (1 Chronicles 4:10) Jabez prayed for God to "enlarge my territory" with an adventurous spirit and he received not only the lands but power and protection. Caleb conquered the hill country and Jabez enlarged his territory.

From the perspective of the Christian worldview, there are major issues with this paradigm of the "Vision for Unexplored lands:"

- 1) We often misunderstand our own adventurous spirit or pioneering personality as a God-given vision.
- 2) In the process of pursuing the unexplored lands, we inevitably either stretch ourselves beyond our limit unnecessarily sacrifice other valuable aspects of our lives. In addition, to venture into the unexplored land, you have to risk everything without knowing the outcome of your effort.
- 3) This vision is not for everyone. One may be limited by one's capabilities or available resources, no matter how good the idea may be. Although we cannot discount the value of someone who is trying to reach a goal, no one ever has tried before.

Vision for No-Vision Lands

The paradigm of the "Vision for No-Vision Lands" (*mubijeonjiron*) is an anti-vision or a non-vision. It generally means having no particular vision, rather truly depending on the daily guidance of the Lord. It came out in opposition to the problems of the Highlands or Unexplored Lands visions and reaction to the streams of visionary voices like Helen Keller: "The most piteous person is not the blind or deaf and dumb but the one who has no vision though he has sight." Of course, the ultimate goal of this vision would be to help others and glorify God by trusting the Lord step by step. As far as I've heard, this vision is much encouraged by Professor InSoo Kim from Korea University

Even though it is a reactionary vision to the Highlands or Unexplored Land visions, it's a necessary vision for today's age of ambition. It's a Biblical vision and a revolutionary vision, precious as the morning dew, but it's very difficult to embrace personally. But you should not be afraid of uncertainty about your future, and at same time, you should be very sensitive to follow the guidance of the Lord every moment of your life. I genuinely desire that many of you would be willing to trust the Lord with your future according to this vision.

A good example of this vision is David. David was suddenly anointed by Samuel (1 Samuel 16:13) and one day he "became one of armor-bearers of King Saul." (1 Samuel 16:21), David killed the Philistine Goliath in the Valley of Elah on the way to see his brothers (1 Samuel 17:50). Jonathan, son of Saul, became one in spirit with David. (1 Samuel 18:1), David married Michal and become Saul's son-in-law. (1 Samuel 18:27), David fled from Saul and stayed in wilderness. (1 Samuel 19:18- 2 Samuel 1:17), David was anointed as King over the house of

Judah for seven years and six months in Hebron. (2 Samuel 2:4-11), David was anointed as King over Israel in Jerusalem. (2 Samuel 5:3-17), David defeated many enemies of Israel. (2 Samuel 8:1- 10:18) He has been sensitive to follow the guidance of the Lord every moment of his life without a strong vision of King.

From the perspective of the Christian worldview, there are major issues with this paradigm of the "Vision for No-Vision Lands:"

- 1) We can easily misunderstand our visionless spirit or lack of awareness of historical sensitivity as a God-given call to be without vision. I personally believe young generation is losing perspective of the importance of their presence in this very moment of history.
- 2) Without a clear vision, you may be wondering about from place to place. You may easily forget what the Bible says about "the Redeeming the time, because days are evil." (Ephesians 5:16) You may suddenly end up with the Highlands or Unexplored vision when you are tired of wondering about.
- 3) In the process of following the No-Vision Lands, you run the risk of losing your spiritual reality and sensitivity. This vision may be strictly limited by your faith.

Vision for Lowlands

Apart from previous visions, my alternative idea for young-adults is the paradigm of the "Vision for Lowlands." The "Vision for Lowlands" (*jeojideron*) is simply to empty oneself and to choose a road to the low lands to glorify God and enjoy Him whether you are in high position or low position. In general it means to give up human ambition and simply invest yourself wherever you are at the moment. Actually it comes out in reaction to the problems of the Highlands and Unexplored Lands visions and No-Vision Lands ideas. I hope it helps you to find out the true call from the Lord.

The vision for Lowlands has several benefits:

- 1) You don't have to be the best in your field. There are "no little people" in the Kingdom of God, as Francis A. Schaeffer pointed out.
- 2) You don't have to compare yourself with others. What you need is do your best to climb up your own ladder, rather than to compare with your friend's ladder.
- 3) You don't have to take unnecessary risks in an area you don't feel confident in or you can't be sure about God's call.

You only need to see an ultimate call to humble yourself or "make yourself nothing" in your present field or position right now. This paradigm of the "Vision for Lowlands" sheds light on

the fact that everyone has a unique God-given talent and vision that is equally precious in the eyes of God. It is unique because it is God-given, not because it is the only one in the world. Nor does the magnitude of impact or influence determine the importance of this talent.

However, from the perspective of the Christian worldview, we have to think about some major issues with this paradigm before considering the good examples of this vision:

1) You might despise those who are pursuing the Highlands or the Unexplored Lands as materialistic or unspiritual without respect. On the other hand, you might misunderstand that the Lowlands vision is too mundane compared to those who are on the way to the Highlands or Unexplored Lands.

2) You might think that the Lowlands Vision is for those who can't fit into society, for the naïve-minded who believe it's an easy or less risky way to live, or for those with a peace-at-any-price mindset who give up too easily at a hint of difficulty or obstruction.

3) This paradigm is not appealing or attractive to the younger generation, because in our success-oriented society, starting from the bottom of a competitive society is not attractive at all.

Unique Model - Jesus

Jesus is the good and unique model of the Vision for Lowlands. Jesus humbled himself to serve others and obeyed and sacrificed until death. According to Philippians 2:5-8, 'emptying oneself' or 'making oneself nothing' was the central business of Jesus. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus; who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (NIV)

Ekenosen in Greek, "To be emptied" or "made nothing" is hard to properly interpret. There are various theological interpretations of what Jesus did: 1) gave up his glory (Plummer); 2) gave up His right to exercise His independent authority (Hendriksen); 3) gave up His supreme power (Lightfoot); 4) gave up His majestic and sovereign identity (Lightfoot); or 5) gave up His omnipotent and omnipresent divinity (Forsyth, Mackintosh, and Martin). However, the key point of being "emptied" or "made nothing" is that Jesus gave up something he had in order to serve others.

"Taking the very nature of a servant" has several interpretations as well: 1) it's not that Jesus made himself look like a servant or that he pretended to be a servant, but he took on the nature of a servant and became a servant (Hawthorne); 2) it refers to the concept of "the

servants of the Lord” as shown in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 (Martin, J. Jeremias, Lohmeyer); 3) it means Jesus emptied Himself in contrast to His true identity as the Lord (v.11) (Rengstorf, Hawthorne)

“Being found in appearance as a man”, “*homoiomati*” in Greek, means becoming similar to a human being or emphasizes having a human identity. It means Jesus became the same as us except that he did not commit sin (Kent, Lincol). In other words, God Himself came to us in the form of a human being to give his life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45).

The spirit of the incarnation of Jesus, denying or giving up the throne or power in heaven and coming down among us to die on the cross, is the genuine example of the “Vision for Lowlands.” I believe this example of Jesus is also the root of self-denial in our daily life. Jesus clearly said, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.” (Matt 16:24) “Self-denial” doesn’t mean self-destruction or self-replacement of a human being but denial of the sinful nature, denial of self-worship, or the giving up of self-honor for one’s true success.

High School Teacher – Mr. Jeon

I’m sure that there have been numerous people who have followed the “Vision for Lowlands,” as Jesus did. Among many of them, Mr. YoungChang Jeon, principal of GerChang High school is one of the good teachers. I read his biography and his “Ten Commandments for Career Decisions”; I felt that his message is the very one that the younger generation needs to listen to nowadays. (as explained by SoGyun Sung, “Principal Jeon, YoungChang,” BuKyung Church History, No.9, p.107, July 2007)

- 1) Choose a place with low salary
- 2) Choose where you are needed instead of where you want to go.
- 3) Choose a place where promotion is unlikely.
- 4) Choose a wilderness where you have to start from scratch, instead of a place where everything is well-established.
- 5) Avoid places where people are competing to get in; instead, choose a place people are not interested in.
- 6) Choose the path that looks like it has no future.
- 7) Choose the place where you cannot anticipate glory from society.
- 8) Go to the outskirts.
- 9) If your parents, wife, or fiancée objects to your decision, by all means pursue your decision.

10) Pursue the road leading to the cross rather than the road leading to glory and honor.

Because of his belief system, Mr. Jeon didn't want to throw himself into the mainstream after he came back to Korea from Westminster Seminary in The United States and disregarded the path to success and fame. He chose a small, humble high school in GerChang. At that time, the place was literally a "wilderness." The building was falling down. No one had cared for the school for over 10 years, but he taught numerous students and based his teaching on the Christian worldview.

He was a genuine teacher who did not lie. He knew that most of his students wouldn't make the Highlands or the Unexplored Lands. Instead, he knew that most of them would face brutal failures or blockades in their life. He chose to counsel his students: "Put your feet on earth; don't dream of being millionaires," or "Don't waste your life aiming for the Highlands and waiting for the chance to rise above; instead, start from the Lowlands." He taught the truth because he genuinely cared for his students.

Though I'm not sure about his educational philosophy and theology, his "Ten Commandments for Career Decisions" is a good application of the spirit of incarnation and biblical self-denial. His insight is especially apropos for today's young generation who is living in an era of infinite competition for success, fame, and money.

Public Service Man - Mr. Lee

Upon graduating from university, a young man, named ChulSoo Lee came to me to talk about his career path. He wanted to be a journalist for famous broadcasting companies like KBS, MBC or one of the major newspapers. I told him, "It's good to be a journalist, but why don't you go somewhere lower and more sinful according to your gifts?" He assured me that a job in mass media would be brimming with evil.

But I encouraged him to think even lower - to the most corrupt job at that time he could imagine in Korea, like working for the Blue House, military service, Police Office and Central Information Agency. Of course there are many other areas waiting to be redeemed from a depraved condition in our country. Bravely enough, he did choose one of the most corrupt jobs in the country. But being a public service man has not been easy for him.

One of his difficulties was that no woman wanted to date him, and no parents wanted to give their daughter to him. As a young man, it was the toughest narrow path. Another problem

is he hasn't earned enough money with his job to buy a house or an apartment for his family. As you may know, it's a joked that it's almost impossible to find a beautiful wife without three keys in Korea: apartment key, car key and office key. He had only one of these keys when he thought about starting a sweet home.

Although he did finally marry one of the most beautiful, faithful and talented women of the generation, and he and his family had a chance to spend a couple of years his second degree at one of the world best universities, it has been very lonely at times. Because of intense training, he was unable to share his life with his friends and family. His dream is certainly not a financial success or a fairy tale dream of a boy who hopes: "he and his wife with children will live happily together ever after." He has barely achieved his long-cherished dream yet. His vision is a little different dream from Martin Luther King's.

"I have a dream that one day on the top of Seoul Tower the sons of former war victims and the sons of former war criminals will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that my son and daughter will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the ideologies of their thinking but by the content of their character.

I have a dream this afternoon that one day little North Korean children and little South Korean children will be able to join hands as brothers and sisters."

ChulSoo's dream and his life should not be measured by worldly success or the magnitude of his achievement. I must say that he has lived a meaningful and significant life because it is where God wanted him to go. I'm so thankful that he has not followed success-oriented value systems like his other friends; he certainly could have lived a spiritually ineffective life, bearing nothing but the fruit of greedy ambition. Nevertheless, the Lord has used him to make important decisions for the country and for world peace.

It is my dearest desire that numerous young-adults of my country follow the same way of Mr. Lee who has been working for his beloved country's safe and worldwide peace. It is my hope that many of the true dreamers take the most difficult ways like the colleagues of Mr. Lee. It is my prayer that many of "the morning dew of youth"(Psalm 110:3) volunteers go the way C. S. Lewis once confessed after he lost his beloved wife, Helen Joy Davidman: "boys choose safety, men choose suffering."

Conclusion

I hope that many of you will take the visions for the Highlands or Unexplored Lands.

Because of those fields are full of sinners and much hard work. We need as many Christians as possible in those places. It's an excellent choice for you to take the vision for No-Vision Lands as well but you should pay the cost of uncertainty about your future. However, I so much encourage you to look for the Lowlands Vision. It's because you are deeply interested in the God-given vision rather than self desire and wishful ambition. It is true that "nothing is interesting if you are not interested," as Helen Maciness well pointed out. I hope you would remember three things before you go any further decision for your vision.

First, remember that "you should not vex yourself with unrealistic goals," as John Stek correctly commented on Ecclesiastes. You would better to encourage yourself with realistic goals for the near future. You don't have to worry about expressing yourself when you feel an indignation or holy anger against world. You would be better to demonstrate your indignation and anger with your visionary dream rather than keep silent or worry about world. "The true meaning of vision," as John Stott pointed out, "can be found where there is a deep dissatisfaction of what is and a deficiency of what could be," like Daniel, William Wilberforce and Mr. Lee.

Second, remember that there are so many godly people who have been suffering because of the God-given visions based on faith: "Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised." (Hebrews 11:36-39, NIV)

Third, remember main principles of Daniel, David, John the Baptist and Apostle Paul (cf. Daniel 1:8-21; 2Samuel 22:1-2, Luke 3:1-22; 2Timothy 4:1-22), in addition to Mr. Jeon and Mr. Lee, have had for fulfilling their vision:

- 1) They each have had different visions for achieving their life-long goal.
- 2) They have had the Lowlands Vision and suffered a lot because of it.
- 3) They first tried to change themselves before changing anything else. And when they faced difficulties they never gave up their dream.
- 4) They worked with their friends, and they failed when they worked individually.
- 5) They found alternative, realistic and strategic ideas rather than superficial ideas.
- 6) They kept improving the proficiency, role and primary call.
- 7) They trusted the Lord moment by moment according to the Holy Spirit.

As “we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses,” (Hebrews 12:1), we should have the same brave faith in Jesus and trying to give up ourselves for His Kingdom, taking up our own crosses, according to the spirit of the incarnation. I pray and deeply desire to see countless young adults and senior students heading this way. The fire needed in the hearts of our young generation today is the paradigm of the Vision for Lowlands. May the Lord bless you and your God-given Vision.