

Andy Hawthorne

Develop a Prophetic Vision: A case study

The Message Trust is a movement with a prophetic vision. Andy Hawthorne (Founder and CEO) tells the story of how the vision was birthed in 1987:ⁱ

It was all Lady Diana's fault. My brother Simon and I had been selling various fashion accessories and doing OK, until we got hold of these braces... they were the exact ones that Lady Diana had started wearing, and we couldn't sell them fast enough. Business was booming and we needed more employees fast.



Andy Hawthorne OBE

Founder and CEO of The Message Trust
UK

Our factory was based in inner-city Manchester for no better reason than that's where we could get the biggest grants and the lowest rent. But God clearly had a greater plan in mind than boosting our profits, and when the local Job Centre discovered that we had a really poor recruitment procedure they started to send us all the lads they couldn't place anywhere else.

So there we were with all these young lads who had just come out of the local young offenders' institutions or had got sacked by every other local employer. Not only were they hopeless at making braces, there was graffiti, vandalism, violence and theft. This was all very distressing, but the worst of it was that they seemed to know nothing of Christ. Simon and I were shocked that no one was sharing the gospel with them either through words or actions.

Maybe we shouldn't have been surprised. After all, the churches around the factory were the sort that met behind barbed wire fences with the alarm on whilst lads like the ones we employed chucked bricks through the windows.

The largest church on the estate stood about 50 yards from our factory, but long ago it had been shut down and sold to a knitwear manufacturer. We'd go in there from time to time, dropping off the jumpers we'd embroidered. Where the pews used to be, there were knitting machines rattling away but still above the choir stalls in gold leaf it read: 'Without a vision, the people perish'. If ever there was a prophetic word for inner-city Manchester, this was it. It's not that there never had been Christians with God-given visions: hundreds of years ago they sacrificed so much of what they had to build beautiful church buildings. Sadly, somewhere along the road they had lost the vision of being the Jesus-honouring, Bible-believing, community-transforming church that the area so desperately needed.

By the time April 1987 came around business was booming. Simon and I were at a local fashion trade show and we got talking about everything. Yes, our staff were a little scrappy, but we were doing well. But was that it? Wasn't there something else we should be doing besides giving these lads a job? As we talked, something happened. We felt as though we had something extra special straight from God himself: vision. We hatched a plan. It was probably a bit arrogant – and it was certainly naïve of us – but we decided to write to all 1100 church leaders in Greater Manchester and set them a challenge. There were so many young people with so many needs – would these churches put on their own events to start reaching out to them? If they'd do their bit then Simon and I would book what was then the biggest concert venue in Manchester – The Apollo Theatre – not for one night, but for a full week of credible Christian outreach events with the best bands, theatre companies and special guests.

This was wacky faith stuff, but we rode the buzz of initial excitement for all it was worth. A couple of hours later I got home and every ounce of faith seemed to drain right out of me. I heard a little voice saying: 'Who do you think you are? You've not got the resources, gifts or experience to pull that off, you'll be laughed at!'... I prayed hard and said, 'Please, God, if this idea is really from you, will you confirm it over the next days?' I wish I'd had the guts to ask him to speak to me right then because right after praying that desperate prayer I opened my Bible and read my set reading for the day: Isaiah 43:18-21:

'Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland. The wild animals honour me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to my people, my chosen, the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.'

I don't think there are actually any better or more relevant verses anywhere in the Bible that I could have read back then. Thirty years on, they remain the touchstone words upon which everything we do is built.

That is the story of Andy Hawthorne and The Message Trust. God led Andy through a process that included his personal experience, a 'holy discontent' with the status quo, and revelation from Scripture. Andy's obedient response to God's calling is bearing much Kingdom fruit around the world.

What is your story? How is God birthing a prophetic vision in you that will enable you to serve others by providing a 'preferred destination'... the answer to Jesus' prayer '*your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven*'?

ⁱ Adapted from: 20, Celebrating two decades of changed lives. Andy Hawthorne.