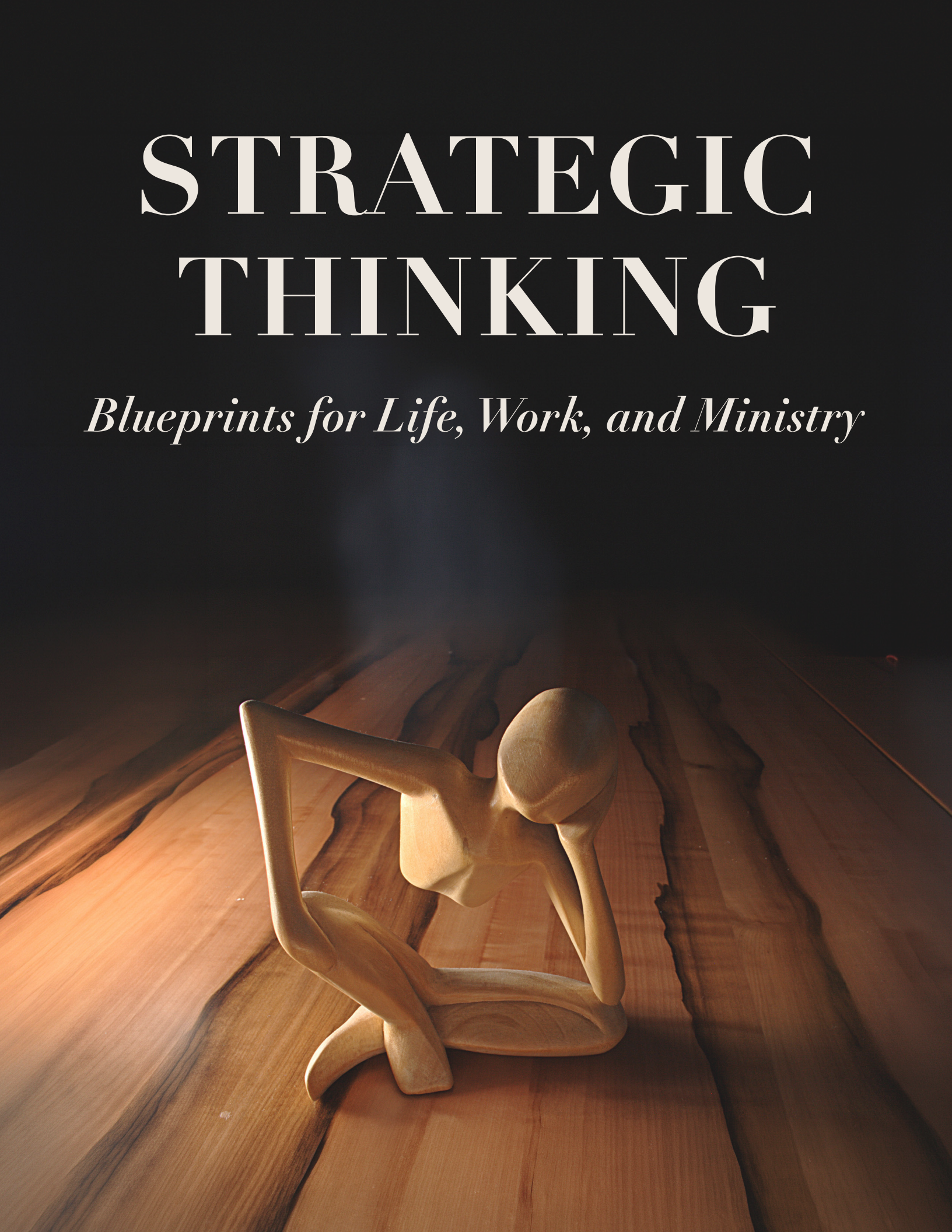
STRATEGIC THINKING

Blueprints for Life, Work, and Ministry



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God created humankind to reflect and emulate the way He thinks and to follow His plan. He calls us to produce lasting fruit which requires intentionality and focus. Uncover the keys to strategic thinking and living so you can better manage the resources entrusted to you and fulfill God's purposes for every aspect of your life, work, and ministry.

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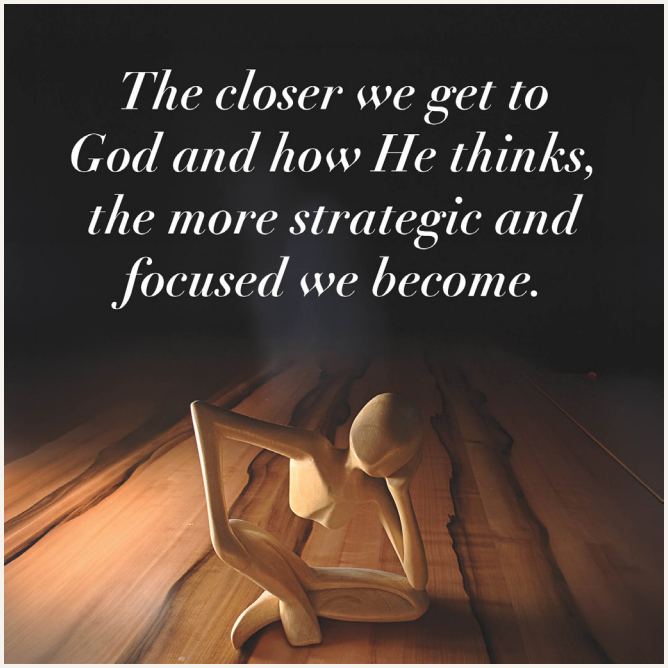
1 | God the Strategic Thinker

God lives and works strategically; the closer we are to Him and how He thinks, the more strategic and focused we become. God thinks from the end to the beginning and from the macro to the micro.

Genesis 1:26-28 explains that God designed us to reflect and emulate the way He thinks so we could rule over the earth. We were created to think the way our heavenly Father thinks, and our heavenly Father is a strategic thinker, par excellence. No one thinks as strategically as He does!

Someone once asked me, "If God loves me so much, why didn't He take me home to be with Him when I got saved?" Good question. Why doesn't God save us all a lot of trouble and take us directly to the sky when we accept salvation? The reason is simple: The earth is our training ground, not only to walk out the implications of the covenant but to grow in relationship and maturity as we learn to be good stewards and managers of His resources. He is after men and women who desire to think the way He thinks, act the way He acts, and are capable of stewarding His creation as co-rulers with Christ.

This concept is novel to many believers. They have always thought the purpose of their salvation was to become holy, go to heaven, and sing in the heavenly choir. All these things have a place, but that is not the



KEY SCRIPTURES:

Then God said, "Let Us make mankind in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the livestock and over all the earth, and over every crawling thing that crawls on the earth." So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." —GENESIS 1:26-28

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reason He saved us. The reason is that Father is building a family business. He wants us to take our place as managers in the family business, fulfilling His plan of using believers to bring life on Earth under His order.

SUMMARY:

- God thinks from the end to the beginning and from the macro to the micro.
- The earth is our training ground, not only to walk out the implications of the covenant but to grow in relationship and maturity as we learn to be good stewards and managers of His resources.
- He wants us to take our place as managers in the family business, fulfilling His plan of using believers to bring life on Earth under His order.

SCRIPTURES CONTINUED:

And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. —ROMANS 8:17

This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. —ACTS 2:23

All who live on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written since the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slaughtered. —REVELATION 13:8

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Have you ever thought of God as being strategic? Why or why not?
2. Why is it important for us to think strategically?

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2 | Ingredients for Strategic Thinking

Strategic thinking requires both revelation and self-conscious awareness. The Holy Spirit must reveal to you why you need to think this way. Remember what Jesus said to Peter in Matthew 16, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this unto you but your Father who is in heaven." We need a revelation of strategic thinking!

Strategic thinking is the understanding and self-conscious awareness that gives power to what you do. It is one thing to do something by accident; it is another thing to be self-consciously aware of what you are doing. Self-consciousness adds power of infinite measure to what you do. You cannot reproduce an accident, but once you become self-conscious and understand the mechanisms and the principles behind it, you can intentionally recreate the same phenomenon. That is why we must become self-conscious in our thinking.

Strategic thinking is ultimately the understanding, desire, and ability to marshal and steward resources over time and effectively carry out a task.

- **Understanding:** We must have a revelation of our need to think strategically.
- **Desire:** We must have the willingness to learn and pay the price to live strategically.



KEY SCRIPTURES:

And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. —MATTHEW 16:17

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the boundless greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places... *(continued)*

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- **Ability to marshal:** We must have the ability to effectively steward our lives and focus on a preplanned direction that produces anticipated results.
- **Over time:** Strategy requires time to work through and committed relationships which are built through trust earned over time.

SCRIPTURES CONTINUED:

...far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and made Him head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. —EPHESIANS 1:18-23

Take the example of a prism. If you hold the prism up to the sun, you can focus its light and start a fire. You can take diffused heat and make it highly focused and multiply its power. God sees, plans, and applies all His resources into a specific focus, just as He did in Christ. That is what God wants for all our lives and ministries—the focusing of our life force so that we move a specific thing in a pre-planned direction, and it produces anticipated, purposeful results. That is effective life and ministry. Through this focus of energy and resources, we can accomplish the goals God has established by the Spirit.

In addition to revelation and awareness, we need the ingredients of time and key relationships. Strategy requires time, and time requires committed relationships that operate with longevity. It takes covenanted people working together over time to produce anything that lasts, be it family, church, ministry, or a business. Strategic thinking is beginning with the end in mind.

SUMMARY:

- Strategic thinking is ultimately the understanding, desire, and ability to marshal and steward resources over time and effectively carry out a task.
- God wants all our lives and ministries to be focusing our life force so that we can move a specific thing in a pre-planned direction, and produce anticipated, purposeful results.
- Strategy requires time, and time requires committed relationships that operate with longevity.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why is time so important relative to strategy?
2. What are some of the sacrifices involved in living strategically?

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3 | The Carnal Mind Versus the Strategic Mind

God's mind and thinking are divine and eternal. The focal point of the Father's resources is His Son, Jesus Christ. What is the focal point of your mind and resources, and how do you know?

While God's mind is divine and strategic, our carnal minds often think short-term. We tend to think in terms of the immediate: "If it feels good, I will do it." I will take the path of least resistance based on what feels good. Most Christians live on this level. However, feelings produce short-run goals and short-run living.

To the other extreme, we have fatalism which says, "The world is too big. I am powerless to change it, so why attempt to make long-range plans?" The carnal mind operates at these two extremes: We either live by our feelings and take the path of least resistance, or we live by fatalism and avoid long-term planning because we believe failure is inevitable.

However, because we have (or should have) the mind of Christ, we are called to think strategically. We are to manage His cosmos, i.e., the world order. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." World or cosmos comes from the root word, *komeo,* which means "to tend for in an orderly arrangement." God so loved the orderly arrangement that He did what? He gave us



KEY SCRIPTURES:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life. —JOHN 3:16

For those who are in accord with the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are in accord with the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. —ROMANS 8:5-8

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His only Son so we could have eternal life. When we read that, we might think God is just talking about the saving of souls. But He is talking about the *entirety* of His creation. Paul shows us that in Romans 8 when he talks about the whole creation groaning in travail. Sin marred all creation, including both man and nature. Because God loves to tend and bring order to His creation, He sent His Son to die for us and to recapture the ability for us to manage all that He created.

SCRIPTURES CONTINUED:

The plans of the diligent certainly lead to advantage, but everyone who is in a hurry certainly comes to poverty. —PROVERBS 21:5

SUMMARY:

- God's mind is divine and strategic, our carnal minds often think short-term.
- Because God loves to tend and bring order to His creation, He sent His Son to die for us and to recapture the ability for us to manage all that He created.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are some of the pitfalls of the carnal mind?
2. Discuss the command to steward the cosmos and what that implies for us as believers.

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4 | Attributes of Strategic Thinking, Part 1

There are four key attributes of strategic thinking. Today's study will address the first two.

Key 1: Strategic thinking produces design in all it touches. God is a designer. He created everything according to its kind. In other words, if your ministry is raising cattle, don't go into the chicken business! Many people struggle to identify their ministry, so they try everything, hoping they will accidentally find their anointing. When an organization starts, there may be numerous projects, needs, or opportunities screaming for attention. This snare can divert us from our primary calling and purpose. Studies on the most effective long-term companies show a common characteristic of sticking to their niche. A successful company knows its primary purpose and does not get involved in producing products or services that could divert it from its main call.

Key 2: A strategic thinker thinks from the whole to the part and from the end, backward. This type of thinking ensures the overall goal is in sight. Ask yourself, "What will this ministry or project look like in its fruition?" Of course, it rarely ends up looking exactly like that. But if you don't start with a big-picture vision to work backward from, I guarantee you will never get there. You don't think forward first; you must think backward.



KEY SCRIPTURES:

And God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind; and God saw that it was good. —GENESIS 1:21

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts." —ISAIAH 55:8-9

All who live on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been [e]written since the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slaughtered. —REVELATION 13:8

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Isaiah 55:8 reminds us, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways." God thinks from the end to the beginning. That is why He was the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. He didn't just think about the Garden of Eden in Genesis; He thought about the full consequences beyond the Book of Revelation. If you have the mind of Christ, you can begin to think from the end to the beginning and from the whole to the part—because that is the way God thinks.

SUMMARY:

- Strategic thinking produces design in all it touches.
- A strategic thinker thinks from the whole to the part and from the end, backward.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How can focusing on your specific design or calling help prevent distractions in ministry or leadership? What are some examples of distractions that can pull people away from their primary purpose?
2. What does it practically look like to "think from the end backward" in ministry, business, or personal life, and how can this way of thinking change the decisions you make today?

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5 | Attributes of Strategic Thinking, Part 2

There are four key attributes of strategic thinking. Today's study will address the second two.

Key 3: Strategic thinking builds a platform and focal point from which to work. If you plan to build something, you must have both a platform and the tools. *What is it that Father has given me as the platform of my operation? What key relationships, mission, church, business focus, or other resources has He provided as my base?*

Key 4: Strategic thinking relativizes and prioritizes all activity. That is, strategic thinking puts everything into perspective. If you are in the cattle business and a chicken opportunity comes, you must ask, "How will this chicken deal fit into the cattle-raising business?" If it does not fit, do not do it. Whatever does not fit into your primary function is jettisoned. We prioritize by identifying our primary directive, ensuring all our activities are directly related to it. We ask: *How will this lead to the furtherance of the master plan or assignment? Will it matter in five, ten, or twenty years that I am doing this?*

I now measure my days by these long-term questions. I do not judge the success of my day by how much work I got done. I can grind out a lot of work, but this effort is moot if it has not moved the ball down the field one inch; all it has done is maintain my current assignment. I must instead look at whether



KEY SCRIPTURES:

Now faith is the certainty of things hoped for, a proof of things not seen.
—HEBREWS 11:1

For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost, to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who are watching it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This person began to build, and was not able to finish!' Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether... *(continued)*

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today's efforts will matter next year and many years from now. If I put time into something that matters in the big picture, I consider it a good day. If you do not invest a portion of your time into long-run projects, you will continually stay in the hamster wheel. You will answer all your emails and phone calls, shuffle papers, read some books, and at the end of the year, you will be satisfied until you realize you are in the same place you began. We must recognize that which is our long-term work and sow into it.

SUMMARY:

- Strategic thinking builds a platform and focal point from which to work.
- Strategic thinking relativizes and prioritizes all activity.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Under key 3 ask and discuss the four primary questions listed.
2. Are there any key areas in your life where your priorities might be out of line with your overall life objective?

SCRIPTURES CONTINUED:

...he is strong enough with ten thousand men to face the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Otherwise, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and requests terms of peace. So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. "Therefore, salt is good; but if even salt has become tasteless, with what will it be seasoned? It is useless either for the soil or the manure pile, so it is thrown out. The one who has ears to hear, let him hear."

—LUKE 14:28-35

So then, be careful how you walk, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

—EPHESIANS 5:15-17

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6 | Strategic Thinking as a Lifestyle

To live and think strategically, we must be committed to creating a regular habit of setting aside time simply to think and do nothing else. We need to think and freely process all aspects of our lives: family, business, spiritual, and service in general. Until we see the value of regular, reflective time, strategic living will be either a "plastic exercise" or a legalistic ritual. This time to think is committed reflection, with paper and pen at hand, to record what God will bring to mind.

Quietness before God regularly is the hardest thing for most leader/builder-type people. Quietness requires not only the absence of external activity but the quieting of the mind internally. To help achieve this, I write down the obvious "to do's" that show up in the quietness of my mind in the first twenty minutes or so. Gradually, as I come to true quietness, insight often comes. The ideas and concepts discovered take us to a greater level of creative thinking and multiple-level problem-solving. True strategic thinking is multi-level, often buried behind to-do lists which cut short the reflective process before it begins. Undoubtedly, God gave us the gift of a day of Sabbath rest to promote the use of sufficient time to move from work and checklists the level of, "Lord, what do YOU want me to see?"

Strategic planning, while it does involve agendas, duties, scope-and-sequence con-



KEY SCRIPTURES:

Commit your works to the Lord, and your plans will be established. —PROVERBS 16:3

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. For six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; on it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male slave or your female slave, or your cattle, or your resident who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and everything that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; for that reason the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. —EXODUS 20:8-11

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cepts, and critical path exercises should ultimately serve us by clarifying what is truly important. Goals and personal achievement targets for our personal lives or ministries may be contrary to our growth in Christ. Our objectives must be birthed in God, aligned with our engifted destiny, and energized by faith rather than simple ego needs or materialistic greed. This value clarification is not an exercise in psychological games; it is born through the practice of asking the right questions and regularly having reflective, quiet time before God.

SCRIPTURES CONTINUED:

Stop striving and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted on the earth.
—PSALM 46:10

But Jesus Himself would often slip away
to the wilderness and pray.
—LUKE 5:16

SUMMARY

- To live and think strategically, we must be committed to creating a regular habit of setting aside time simply to think and do nothing else.
- Strategic planning should ultimately serve us by clarifying what is truly important.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What practical changes do you need to make to your schedule in order to build in more regular time to just sit and think?
2. Who in your sphere of influence should you share some of these key truths with?

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