

# Is Strategic Planning Biblical?

*Looking at leaders from Scripture.*

by Mark Marshall

You know your church needs to rethink its strategy. You know there is no real sense of how to accomplish the work that God has called your church to do. You look at your church, and it seems that every year is simply a repeat of the past year. There is nothing intentional about what you do. But you wonder if strategic planning is biblical. First, you wrestle with this in your own mind. Then you realize some of the lay leadership in your church are asking the same questions.

## Is there a biblical basis for strategic planning?

Do we have a biblical foundation for the concept of strategic planning, or is it something we have taken from the secular business model and applied to our churches? Does God honor the process of strategic planning? By principle and by example, God's Word establishes strategic planning as one of the ways He works in and through His people. There are a number of leaders in Scripture who thought and acted strategically. Yes, strategic planning is found in Scripture.

### Moses

We see clearly in Scripture that Moses was a strategic thinker—or at least he learned to be. Moses was struggling as a leader soon after he led the nation of Israel out of Egypt. His father-in-law, Jethro, came to see him after hearing the incredible things God had been doing. Jethro observed that Moses was overwhelmed with the burdens of leadership and shared with him a God-given plan—a strategy—for dealing with the issue. Jethro taught Moses how to set up a strategic plan by delegating the work so that the load would be spread among many. As a result, the manpower resources were used more effectively and the ministry was accomplished. Moses was also thinking strategically when he sent spies to the land of Canaan.

### Joshua

Joshua, the protégé of Moses, also demonstrated strategic leadership. In Joshua 6 God gave Joshua a little lesson on strategic thinking. As Joshua was to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, they were facing the first enemy in the land. It just so happened to be the strong city of Jericho. God gave Joshua a strategy. He could have simply reached down from heaven and zapped the city, but God chose to work through a strategy that involved His people. God continues to work through His people today.

### Nehemiah

Nehemiah was a God-appointed leader who used a strategy. When God laid it on his heart to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, Nehemiah began to establish and then work through a well-planned strategy to accomplish the vision God had given. He assessed the damage. He secured the resources. He established leaders and distributed the assignments among them. Anyone who has ever built a structure, from a doghouse to a three-bedroom house, will acknowledge Nehemiah's need for some kind of drawn-out plan for the reconstruction of the walls.

## **David**

David was a strategic thinker from boyhood. He did not defeat Goliath with his might or strong armor. He defeated Goliath using a God-given strategy that pinpointed the weakness of his enemy. Later, as a leader of soldiers, David used strategy in battle. David needed men who could think and plan strategically, and God gave him the men of Issachar (1 Chron.12:32).

## **Jesus**

The Old Testament is filled with examples of leaders who established strategic plans and carried them through. What about the New Testament? We can point to Jesus Christ as a great example of one who had a strategy. He began by recruiting His leadership, developing them, then sending them "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8, NIV). His strategy included some public teaching and miracle working. Ultimately, His strategy took Him all the way to the cross, the grave, and the resurrection. Jesus Christ knew the plan to provide redemption for all of mankind long before leaving heaven to carry it through.

## **Paul**

The apostle Paul, a key player in establishing the early church, had a strategy. It is obvious in reading the accounts of his missionary journeys that Paul chose key cities in which to establish beachheads for ministry. He chose cities where he might have the greatest influence on the largest number of people. Ephesus, for example, was the gateway to Asia Minor.

## **Accomplish God's purposes through strategic planning.**

Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." God's purpose is the element in strategic planning for the church that is vastly different from the secular strategic planning models. We see setting our hearts and minds on God as the beginning of the strategic planning process. Without question, it is God's plan we want, not our own.

God obviously expects us to plan. He has given to us a number of clear principles along with some great examples. He makes it clear that we are not to trust our own plans and strategies and ignore the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is only after we seek the heart of God and His direction that we can establish plans that are pleasing to Him and plans that will succeed.

Strategic planning is not only a biblical concept, it is a biblical mandate. It is God's chosen method of working to establish how you and your church intend to carry out the Great Commission. Don't just repeat last year. Be intentional in getting God's heart and knowing how you will accomplish His mission in your setting.

## **Proverbs Speaks**

The book of Proverbs has a number of clear practical principles regarding strategy and planning.

- ? Proverbs 14:15: "A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps."
- ? Proverbs 15:22: "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed."
- ? Proverbs 16:3: "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed."
- ? Proverbs 16:9: "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps."
- ? Proverbs 20:18: "Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance."

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