

Let's start our talk today about strategy with seven bold words. Yeah, right, that's seven bold words: *you can't most fully understand strategy if...* What we're going to do is examine the unmatched strategy of God and His Kingdom, doing that along with looking at successful folks like Churchill and Bezos.

So, to start, every organization, *every enterprise has a strategy!* In fact, not having a strategy, in reality, actually *is* a strategy—just a mighty poor one. There's an old saying that says "aim at nothing and you'll hit it every time!" That's what the phrase "no strategy" means—so, if your enterprise is being wildly buffeted about in an ocean of change as a victim without strategic understanding, aims and processes, your lack of a real strategy will surely be devastating. Yeah, if your business, your nonprofit, or your church doesn't have a clear strategy that the leaders *and* the rank and file understand and truly embrace, well, then, you are going not going to hit your strategic target—simply because there is no firm target to hit!

Now, from a previous podcast, we know that God has a particular strategy. Let's revisit some key sentences from that episode—then we'll pick the broad topic of strategy up again from there... "The Bible narrative *stuns*: the economies of untested or unrepentant creatures are shakeable...*but the Kingdom of repentant and redeemed creatures anchored by the crucified, sacrificial Christ is unshakeable!*

"So then, let's go back to our definition of strategy: *an organization's strategy is a plan of action designed to achieve an overarching and enduring aim.* Yeah, God's Kingdom strategy was conceived as a *plan* from the foundation of the world and was manifested in *action* at the Cross. And God is clearly waiting to ensure the gratitude of all the current *and coming billions of people* who would repent and be grateful in ongoing humility for Christ and His unshakeable Kingdom! *That, my friends, is the only perfect strategy in all history—God's utterly unique strategy of a plan and actions fulfilling an overarching aim! That merits intense learning relevant to all of our realms of life...now and forever! Now that's crazy good!*"

Hey, along the way of observing and actually living out this in our own lives, we can find concrete realities embedded in God's strategy through both unfolding Bible narratives and in a Spirit-led understanding of history. And that's why we started this episode with this phrase: *you can't most fully understand strategy if...* And now we finish the sentence: *you can't most fully understand strategy if...you don't carefully grasp God's revelatory, concrete actions and inactions in His economy evidenced in the Bible and history!*

That's right, to be great strategists, we need to carefully examine and grasp God's revelatory, concrete actions and inactions in His economy as evidenced in the Bible and history!

So, let's start with why that's our approach here. When you go to search on Google—yes, even some AI empowered sources—you will find something very curious: *there are a gazillion "experts" on strategy.* I deliberately put the word "experts" in quotes: real strategy is hard to define well, so countless folks quickly try to differentiate themselves with spicy approaches that can help gain followers or clients.

But the *genuinely-earned* experts on strategy are those who actually *do* strategy very well, not those who *consult* about strategy. Look, great strategists of the last hundred years or so include Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who successfully maneuvered such that the U.S. joined the overmatched Great Britain in a world war...Sam Walton with his Walmart success...another British Prime Minister, Maggie Thatcher, who restored global standing and much prosperity for England...Bill Gates and his especially notable pivots at Microsoft away from his already-successful vectors...Jeff Bezos and his use of Amazon Web Services (AWS) as part of his overall Amazon company strategy. These real-world examples frustrate and even defy "easy-schmeasy" seminar-style boardroom categories of success in strategy. Most importantly, these concrete examples help lift us out of academic lingo and gobbledygook into observable actions!

But so far I've neglected—yes, I actually left out—the most profound observable outcome from a clear strategy manifested during the last hundred years. And that is the numerical expansion of God's Kingdom through most of the 20th century...yes, the adding of followers! That's right, hundreds of millions of people worldwide responded and believed in Christ for eternal life, *fulfilling part of God's strategic aim and*

desire that all people be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). And that was concretely effected by the actions of believers concretely taking the Gospel to many nations and discipling...both in person and over the air waves!

Yes, far beyond the likes of Churchill, Thatcher, Walton, Gates, and Bezos, God changed the landscape in unmatched ways by prompting His people to implement a world-class strategy—specifically to “go forth and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18-19). Again, how did He do that? By clearly stating His strategic desire “that none would perish” (2 Peter 3:9), redeeming failure, and commanding His disciples to execute an international strategy (Acts 1:8)—then and now!

And boy, that really did take off, you know, with the early church and its missionary journeys documented in the Bible, journeys that are sometimes shown by modern publishers with accompanying maps in the back of a paper Bible. But sadly, God’s timeless strategy has not been followed in its fullness consistently: we kinda have to skip forward to a time much later that some historians have pegged to be the start of the modern missions movement—when William Carey wrote about missions and went to India in 1793.

Between the early church and the modern mission movements pegged to Carey’s time, there was always, of course, a faithful remnant of missions-focused believers. But institutional church history overall is quite disappointing—often a sad and even sordid affair indeed—with God’s desire for the Gospel to be spread worldwide often bluntly neglected. Indeed, for several centuries, key Reformers and their followers tended to emphasize consolidating power through political, often bloody, alliances with the princes of this world throughout Europe rather than relying on the empowering Holy Spirit to evangelize the wide world beyond Europe as their primary strategic aim.

So, do you see what I’ve just done? I’ve migrated from practical talk about Churchill, Thatcher, Walton and Bezos to work to unveil *God’s practical, concrete strategic success*—but then also inconveniently including the unfortunate point that much of church history is not much of a success at all when measuring it against *God’s practical, concrete commands to His disciples!* That unfortunate history is no surprise to readers of Revelation 1-3 about the seven churches, most of whom were lacking in God’s aims.

And this is not just a phenomenon in the New Testament era! God clearly documents the concrete failure of Adam and Eve to fully follow His rule in the Garden of Eden...He tells the story of concrete rebellion of Noah’s time...He tells the story of the concrete failures of Jacob’s family in their handling of Joseph...He tells the story of the concrete lifting up of Israel, their direct rebellion by asking for a human king to replace God as King, and the disasters that befell the Israelites afterwards...and He tells God’s people how to concretely get back on track through His prophets. *But all that strategically set up redemption at the Cross!*

Then, the events of Jesus’s earthly ministry tell the stories of concrete failure of folks like the Pharisees who put their trust in their own righteousness they tried to earn through the Law. Yes, as we heard in the previous strategy episode, God is all about *shakeability savvy, failure points, and redeeming responses*.

You see, God foreknew humanity’s choices towards disobedience and folly. And He embedded that concrete reality in His Word and in later history in order for those with “an ear to hear” to understand strategy better than any armchair theorists or perhaps even practitioners like Bezos. And to be sure, God’s *short-term inaction* while humanity makes poor choices is as revealing as His direct action is at other times. So, I return to our point today: *to be great strategists, we need to carefully examine and grasp God’s concrete, revelatory actions and inactions in His economy evidenced in the Bible and history!*

Hey, there are countless opinions about strategy using grand theories, cool buzzwords and successful but less-enduring strategies from the likes of Churchill, but the very best we can do to most fully understand concrete strategy in our enterprises—including the local church—is to saturate ourselves with practical, concrete instruction and examples from God’s economy and ask the Holy Spirit to teach us all things, as Jesus promised He would (John 14:26). That will illuminate our lives with more understanding and wisdom for concrete strategies than we ever dreamed possible! *So, saturate yourself with God’s doings!*

A&A: Application & Action

1. In my experience, many who consider themselves great leaders are hard-pressed to truly articulate a concrete, actionable strategy for the very organizations they lead. How about your workplace? Your church? Give illustrations.
2. How does your local church respond in substantive obedience to the Great Commission in order to fulfill the specific, concrete commands of Christ to go forth and make disciples to the ends of the earth? If they respond well, give examples. If not, why is your church not doing so?
3. Of course, every believer is appointed to full-time ministry in serving the Lord regardless of vocation, from full-time parent to clerk to engineer to pastor to retiree. What is your personal strategy for your family, workplace, church, and beyond? Be specific and concrete.