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5 Keys to Living a Strategic Life

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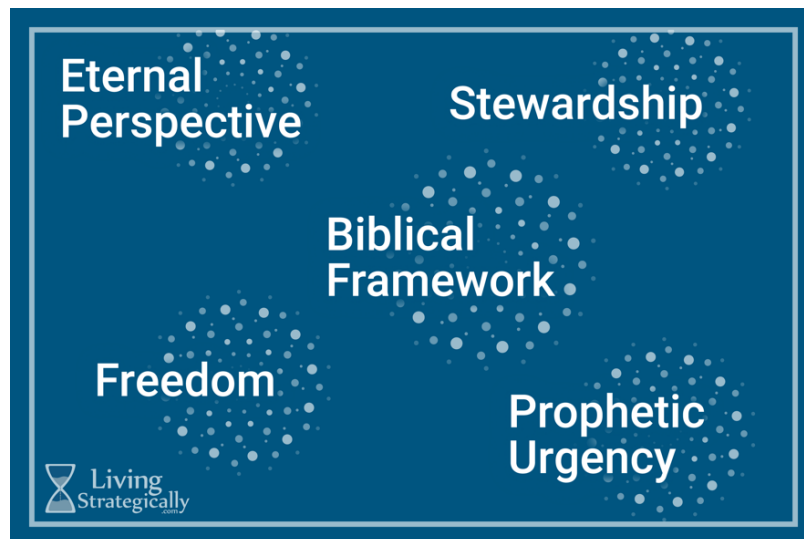
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FIVE KEYS TO LIVING A STRATEGIC LIFE

The Bible says that “man is like a mere breath; his days are like a passing shadow.” It also says that we “are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.”

In other words, life is short. Life is also unpredictable. We don’t know what tomorrow holds.

So how do we make the most of the brief, uncertain time we have on earth? You have to have a strategy.



Everything we produce at Living Strategically touches on one or more of our five pillars of living a strategic life, which come from our foundational verses:

*“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”
Ephesians 5:15-17 (NASB)*

These verses give us a biblical prescription for living wisely. They form a foundation for Christians who want to build a life of purpose and true fulfillment.

1. Eternal Perspective

“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise...”

The Bible tells us that part of living wisely is remembering that this earth is not our home. Our real citizenship is in Heaven and we are to invest our temporal assets in ways that gain eternal dividends. Related verses: Matthew 6:19-21 and 1 John 2:15-18

2. Stewardship

"...making the most of your time...."

God is the owner of all that we manage, which makes us stewards. Wise stewards use their time, energy, money, and talents in ways that bring God glory and advance kingdom purposes. When we are faithful stewards, God's blessings follow. Related verses: 1 Corinthians 4:2, 1 Timothy 6:6-19, and 1 Peter 4:7-11

3. Freedom

We know from the full counsel of Scripture that God desires for His people to be free — free from sin and encumbrances that hinder our effectiveness as Christians. We find this freedom when we walk daily by the Holy Spirit, because He keeps us on the straight and narrow and helps us to see sin for what it really is (captivity) and submission to God for what it really is (freedom).

And in our foundational verses, we see what we should be doing with that freedom: choosing to walk with wisdom and managing our time for maximum impact. Related verses: Galatians 5 and Hebrews 12:1-3

4. Prophetic Urgency

"...making the most of your time, because the days are evil."

Because we are living in the end times, it is crucial to use our days wisely. We must also stay on the alert because our culture will only become increasingly evil. We need to be doing the will of God and studying the Bible, in order to be bright lights in the darkness. Related verses: Mark 13:33 and Matthew 24:37-51

5. Biblical Framework

"So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

To know the will of God, we must be getting daily nourishment from God's Word. This practice builds our faith and keeps our focus on Christ. A biblical framework is the most important key to living a strategic life! Related verses: 1 Timothy 4:6-16 and Hosea 14:9

When these five strategic elements come together, we can live the fruitful and abundant life that God has called us to live.

There is no greater joy to be found in life than fulfilling the calling that God has given you. And the impact it can have on others, both here on earth and for eternity, is astounding!

SIMPLE LIVING IN A CHAOTIC CULTURE

Simple living is an attitude of the heart that can help us align with God’s plan for our lives and find true fulfillment. The world will tell you to aim for quantity over quality. And we are always supposed to want more, more, more. But that actually leads to a stressful life. Simplicity creates margin and it helps us prioritize the essential.



An Aspect of Stewardship

We see the topic of living more simply as an aspect of stewardship and it also goes along with living with an eternal perspective. Those are the first two of our five pillars of living a strategic life.

In our key verses for Living Strategically, Ephesians 5:15-17, God tells us to pay careful attention to how we conduct our lives, making the most of our time on earth. So how do you know if you need to live more simply? You must learn to spot the warning signs that something needs to change:

- Do you lack peace of mind?
- Are you losing sleep at night?
- Is your daily schedule overwhelming because you are over committed?
- Is your health suffering?
- Are you drowning in debt?
- Do you feel unsatisfied, as if you have to continually chase after more?

You must discern when enough is enough. In fact, it’s even better when you can recognize those warning signs as early as possible, before natural consequences take their course.

Ecclesiastes 6:13 tells us, “There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt.” And verse 18 goes on to say, “Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one’s labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward.”

King Solomon, the author of Ecclesiastes, knew a thing or two about having a complicated life. Maybe he was looking at his own life when he saw “riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt.” In fact, most of the book of Ecclesiastes is about Solomon trying to find meaning and fulfillment in all the ways that the world has to offer, and yet coming up empty handed. But his conclusion in 6:18 is beautifully simple: basically, we should enjoy the simple pleasures in life and be content to do an honest day’s work.

They Weren’t Satisfied

Today we live in a society of excess, but God’s original design was for us to live simply. Consider Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God provided everything they needed in that beautiful garden. They had food, water, shelter. They had companionship with God and with their spouse. And their God-given calling was to be stewards of the garden. Genesis 2:15 says, “Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.”

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But they weren’t satisfied. There was a boundary that God told them not to cross, a tree they were not to eat from. God told them the consequence would be death if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But read what happened in Genesis 3:6, “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.”

So, first of all, it brought delight to Eve’s eyes. It was desirable to make her wise. And then she shared it with her husband. In the end, Adam and Eve had many sorrows from their sin. They had to leave the garden, and their relationship with God was greatly impacted.

Eve got caught up in the sin that started from not being satisfied with the life that God had provided. It wasn’t enough for her. She went on to cross the boundary that she knew was wrong to cross. So, what about in our own lives?

Pleasing God

It says in Galatians 1:10, “For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.” This verse reminds us that serving God is more important than striving to please men or even our own desires. The Lord should be our focus.

And in Hosea 13:5-6, God tells the Israelites, “I cared for you in the wilderness, in the land of drought. As they had their pasture, they became satisfied, and being satisfied, their heart became proud; therefore they forgot Me.”

God cared for the children of Israel for 40 years in the wilderness, but when they finally settled in the Promise Land, which was flowing with milk and honey, they became proud and ungrateful. And this verse tells us they forgot their God. Again, the Lord should be our priority in life, but too often we become complacent with what the world has to offer and we lose our focus.

Our chaotic culture tries to sell us a bag of lies in this area. But here’s the truth:

- You cannot maintain an overwhelming schedule. It will damage your health and important relationships will suffer.
- You cannot financially afford an endless cycle of consumerism and increasing your standard of living. You’ll end up in a financial crisis.
- And a larger home or a nicer car will not give your family true happiness. Only the Lord can give you lasting happiness, not physical possessions.

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Not to mention that continuously striving for more is an unhealthy way to live. God wants better for us. Over the years, we’ve learned that contentment is the attitude of gratefully accepting what God gives, while gracefully releasing what He withholds. And God’s plan is the only way to find lasting contentment and true fulfillment.

Getting Personal

For us personally, we made the commitment to be better stewards and live with an eternal perspective in 2013, after being married for 7 years. (That’s also the year we started Living Strategically.)

The first seven years of our marriage were invested in various ministry opportunities, getting college behind us, paying off all debt besides our home, and becoming self-employed. Those

seven years were jam-packed, and we finally reached a point where we knew we needed to intentionally slow down and live more simply. We needed more safeguards in our lives to make sure that God was our #1 focus in all areas of life.

We basically started saying “no” more often than “yes”... and being more intentional with how we spent our time, our money, how we served in ministry opportunities, and even in some activities with family and friends. Now we have been married for fourteen years, and we are in our seventh year of intentionally living more simply. Through simple living, our hearts have found such a deep level of contentment.

Time to Prune

To get to where we are now, we had to prune off the things that were not yielding a return for their investment of time, money, energy, etc. And when you prune something, you see new growth. It was a strategic move that has paid off!

Areas where we personally set boundaries included:

- Time wasters, like social media and spending too many evenings in front of the TV. We deleted our social media accounts and no longer own a television set. (We will say, though, that in our free time and for educational purposes, we do watch videos on YouTube.)
- We became more intentional about our purchases. This has saved us money and stopped the flow of excess from coming into our home. It saves us time because we own fewer items to maintain, and it helps us practice contentment and delayed gratification.
- We intentionally take a Sabbath rest day once a week, which gets us refreshed and gives us extra time with God.
- And a big area of de-stressing our lives was limiting our church and ministry commitments. We took a hard look at where we were serving and only stayed in the areas that aligned with our God-given calling. In some areas, we had been “volun-told” to do tasks and some of those tasks eventually didn’t make the cut. This required a lot of prayer to make sure we were making wise investments for God’s kingdom.



Evaluating the Spiritual Value

One thing that helped us prioritize in these areas was asking “What is the spiritual value in this activity, project, or commitment?” Honestly, some things added up to “busy work” and we had to let those things go. We realized that God doesn’t call us to do it all. And we found that simplifying our commitments and our finances gave us more time for our priorities in life: our relationship with God, our marriage, and our life’s calling.

Being human means that we have limitations, including limited time and resources. We had to decide what was making a lasting impact for God’s kingdom and lining up with God’s will for our lives. And we also needed more margin. We needed more times of rest in order to be our best. And more margin gave us time to evaluate which areas were unfruitful for us.



It’s All About Balance

Balance is a very important part of this equation. Some people go to an extreme and see how minimally they can survive. Some people take it to the opposite extreme and become hoarders. Either extreme can be an unhealthy obsession, rather than a simple way of life, because the focus is on stuff rather than on God.

As Christians, we should be using our resources to serve God, serve others, and provide for the needs of our family. That’s wise stewardship. It’s not about having the least amount of stuff or the most amount of stuff.

And the goal of living simply is not to reach a point where we can relax and take it easy, either. We want to find a healthy balance in our daily schedule between being consumed and being lazy. We need a work-life balance, with times of rest and renewal.

Getting Strategic

The key is finding the point where you are the most effective for God's purposes for your life — in your investments of time, energy, money, and talents.

This requires a strategic process and we came up with an acrostic that spells "SIMPLE" to help us describe the process: **S**top and take inventory, **I**nvest in what really matters, **M**anage your resources wisely, **P**eace and **L**ove, and **E**valuate.

Let's expound...

S – stop and take inventory, evaluate where you need to implement changes in your life.

I – invest in what really matters, prioritize the most important and say "no" to what doesn't line up with God's priorities for you.

M – manage your time, relationships, assets, and abilities as good stewards...remembering that God owns it all. Managing things on a daily basis for an eternal impact.

P – peace: If you are losing peace and stress is setting in, that is an indicator that something needs to change. As you are managing things, monitor your level of peace and make changes where needed. We are always making adjustments when needed.

L – love: God's greatest commandments are to love Him and love others. We keep margin in our schedule in case we need to spend extra time with God or others, filling our love tanks or someone else's love tank.

E – evaluate: daily, weekly, monthly, annually. Make changes where needed, being guided by the Holy Spirit. Life is full of changes. We grow, we need to refocus in certain areas, we have a life changing event. The point is to keep evaluating things and be flexible.

If you follow these steps, you'll be able to cultivate a simpler lifestyle. But remember, this process is ongoing and takes a daily commitment to stay the course.

The Parable of the Sower

There's a passage from the book of Mark that tells the parable of the sower and the four soils. Specifically, we want to highlight the verses that talk about the seed sown among the thorns.

Mark 4:18-19 says, "And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the Word, but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the Word, and it becomes unfruitful."

Living more simply is about the attitude of your heart. Don't get distracted with riches, desiring things, or the worries of the world. Those thorns are part of a temporal world that is passing away and they lead to an unfruitful life.

Living strategically means being a faithful steward with an eternal mindset. And keeping God at the center of your life. Living simpler is the answer to so many worries in life, but only the courageous will make the necessary changes to take hold of that which is truly life.

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RUNNING WITH FREEDOM

We believe that wise Christians make their days count during our short time here on earth. And not just count for anything, but count in the ways that God has intended for our lives.

Sometimes we come against obstacles that hinder the effectiveness of our Christian walk, even hindering us from fulfilling our life's calling. We need to lay aside encumbrances and run the race of faith with freedom!



In the Bible, Paul told the Galatians, “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5:1) The concept of freedom and slavery is interwoven throughout the Bible. From the time of Moses leading the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, all the way through the New Testament where the apostles talk about freedom from spiritual slavery, this running theme is there to help us understand our spiritual condition and why we need the new life that God is calling us into.

Salvation

For example, have you ever considered how the deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt was a foreshadowing of the plan of salvation? Their captivity in Egypt was like a person who is lost, then they were called out of the land. And their deliverance from the curse of death was accomplished through the blood of a lamb on the doorposts of their homes, just like the blood of Messiah (our Passover lamb) delivers us from eternal death.

But then in the wilderness, which is like our life after salvation but before eternity, when the Israelites were free from captivity there was a constant temptation to return to slavery in Egypt. Being free was difficult in a way that was different from the hardship of slavery.

As slaves, their lives were predetermined for them. It may have been miserable, but it was familiar and predictable, and it didn't require faith.

But God's purpose for the Israelites required them to be free, which meant that they had to go out into an unpredictable world and have faith that God would provide. That pattern shows up again and again throughout Scripture.

Laying Aside Encumbrances

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Hebrews 12:1

We can identify two basic ways that Christians today try to leave their freedom and return to slavery. One is to be weighed down, distracted, and hindered by the cares of this world. And the other, to put it frankly, is bondage to sin.

And how do we get past these obstacles? The second verse in Hebrews 12 gives the answer...by “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith”.

Here are some examples of encumbrances in our modern culture, that may not cross the line of sin, but can still keep you from living in freedom:

- the endless accumulation of possessions
- the pursuit of financial success and status
- financial debt
- being distracted with screen time and social media
- being too busy
- dysfunction in a family or a workplace
- tolerating toxic relationships



1 Corinthians 6:12 says, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.” That's the standard we have to apply to everything in our lives. Whenever you feel something weighing you down, or competing with the Holy Spirit for control of your life, that's probably something that you need to prune back or remove entirely.

Another thing to keep in mind is that stress is a warning sign that there's an issue that needs to be dealt with, in order to restore balance and health. Stress can serve a temporary purpose, but if stress has become a permanent thing in your life, that's no longer living in freedom!

The Trap of Sin

“...through Him [Jesus Christ] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you,
and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things,
from which you could not be freed
through the Law of Moses.” Acts 13:38-39

In our modern Christian vocabulary, we talk about “being saved”. But the Bible also uses the phrase “to be freed” in the same way. That's a powerful way of looking at salvation! Sin is captivity. Salvation is freedom.

Ironically, sin usually masquerades as freedom. To the sinner, holiness can look very restrictive. But the test that shows that sin is really a form of captivity is when you try and put it down. If you can't stop doing something that God calls sin, then that sin is controlling you. It's slavery, not freedom.

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The list of sins that Satan tries to use to entrap us could be limitless, but here are some examples:

- **Emotional lives** – pride and bitterness
- **Social lives** – gossip or any time we chose not to love our neighbor
- **Physical lives** – addictions or sexual sin, or neglecting our bodies which are the temple of the Holy Spirit
- **Financial lives** – we can become enslaved to debt, as the Bible says, “the borrower becomes the lender's slave”. Also, there's the temptation to allow money to become an idol.
- **Spiritual lives** – The spiritual aspect encompasses all of the above sins, but there's also a hidden danger of embracing man-made religion, like the Pharisees, instead of the pure and liberating Gospel.

We need to realize that Satan also thinks strategically. He will focus most of his efforts on our areas of weakness to lead us to sin, and the Bible tells us that sin leads to death. That death can

be emotional, social, physical, financial, as well as spiritual. We should be extra cautious in any area that we know is a personal weakness.

Christians who stray into sin, to borrow the words of Paul, “pierce themselves with many griefs” (I Timothy 6:10). And there is a particular danger for Christians, because when you have been set free from something, and then go back to it, it is much harder to get free of it again! For example, the Israelites were set free from Egypt and they were an independent, sovereign nation for hundreds of years, but when they strayed and eventually went into captivity again, they remained the subjects of foreign powers for thousands of years.

The Israelites had sins that they kept tolerating, and we as Christians need to take that example and not just focus on symptoms. When we are struggling with sin in our lives, we need permanent solutions. We don’t need a Band-Aid fix that covers things temporarily. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we need to end that sin completely. We need complete restoration, turning back to living a life of freedom!



Walking by the Spirit

We started this section with Galatians 5:1, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free...” And the entire chapter of Galatians 5 is like the handbook on freedom in the New Testament. Verse 16 gives us the secret weapon in the battle for freedom. It says, “...walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

Walking by the Spirit is the key to staying out of the enemy’s traps and it’s also the key to right living. It’s how you stay out of dysfunction and toxic relationships. It’s how you set your priorities, so you don’t drown in a schedule filled with fruitless tasks. The bottom line is when

we walk by the Spirit, it keeps us on the straight and narrow, because we see sin for what it really is (captivity) and we see submission to God for what it really is (freedom).

It says in 2 Corinthians 3:17, "...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." When we pursue things that lead to freedom, we can set aside encumbrances and live a life unhindered!

UNDERSTANDING PROPHETIC URGENCY

The United States of America was founded on Judeo-Christian values and faith. It once operated as “one nation under God”, and though this phrase is still on our currency, America no longer follows after the ways of God.

While on a book tour in 2019, the Benham brothers declared, “America is changing. Not from Christian to secular, but from secular to pagan.”

It’s true. America is now operating as a pagan nation. Its citizens have allowed the killing of the unborn. Its judiciary has gone against the biblical mandate for holy matrimony. And many churches are choosing to walk hand-in-hand with the culture instead of standing up for biblical truth. These are signs of the times, but are they signs of the end times?

Defining the End Times

The “end times” started in the first century AD. The apostles considered themselves to be living in the end times, which biblically means the period of the new covenant leading up to the second coming of Jesus.

In modern times, major prophetic events have come to pass: Israel once again becoming a nation, the restoration of Jerusalem, and the Jewish people returning to their homeland. These signs show us that we are nearing the *end* of the end times.



In Matthew 24, Luke 21, and Mark 13, Jesus gave a list of “the beginning of birth pangs” that would be precursors to His return, including persecution of the saints, false messiahs, wars and

rumors of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes. The takeaway from these prophetic passages is that there are signs to watch for.

God has a specific timeline for the events of the end times, and in His grace, He has revealed enough of it to us that we shouldn't be lost or confused when we see it unfolding. (Check out [this article](#) for a list of biblical signposts that can help us identify where we are on the biblical, prophetic roadmap.)

So, yes, we are living in the end times. However, the "birth pangs" have just begun and no one knows *when* Jesus will return. As one prophecy teacher described it, "Today we are one day closer to the end than we were yesterday."

Alert and Expectant

"Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming." Matthew 24:42

Two of the basic principles that Scripture gives us about the end times are: that the day of judgment is coming soon and that there will be a great apostasy as the return of Christ draws near. But how soon is "soon"?

Many believers throughout the centuries have expected Jesus to come back in their lifetimes, and they were right to do so. The Bible admonishes us to be alert and expectant. If He delays, it is out of grace so that more may be saved. Regardless of the amount of time that passes, the day of judgement will come "soon" in this regard: it will be much sooner than the world or any complacent believer expects.

Regardless of the amount of time that passes, the day of judgement will come "soon" in this regard: it will be much sooner than the world or any complacent believer expects.

According to Faith

"And without faith it is impossible to please Him...
By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen,
in reverence prepared an ark...and became an heir of the righteousness
which is according to faith." Hebrews 11:6-7

Perhaps the best example of a man who understood prophetic urgency was Noah. God gave Noah a prophetic revelation about the coming judgment of his generation and He assigned Noah a task to prepare for it. The Bible does not record any reluctance or delay on Noah's part; instead, it says, "Noah did according to all that the Lord had commanded him" (Genesis 7:5).

God probably hasn't called you to the same assignment as Noah, but He has given all of His children specific callings. Through faith and obedience, we need to be following God's will for our lives.

Noah lived in an age where "every intent of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord, being a righteous man who was blameless and walked with God (see Genesis 6:8-9). The Lord declared that Noah and his family would be spared from the coming destruction because Noah was the *only* righteous one in his time (see Genesis 7:1).

What does it take to live righteously? A commitment to honor the Lord in all that we do. Standing firm on a biblical foundation and unwavering faith. And rising up to our divine callings.



For Such A Time As This

These are prophetic days, just like the days of Noah. And before we know it, our Savior will return. We read in Matthew 24...

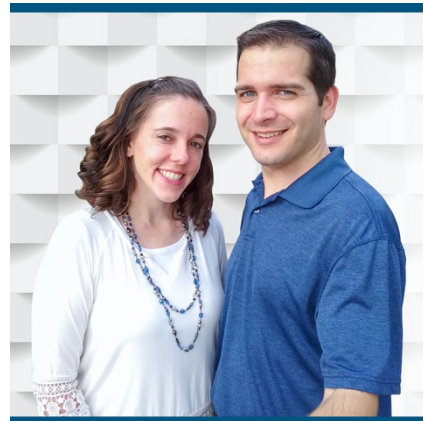
"For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be." Matthew 24:37-39

From studying God's Word, we understand the big picture. We see the signs of the times and we fully trust in God's plan. Now it is time for biblical Christians to live each day with prophetic urgency.

ABOUT US

Living Strategically is not an organization or company. It is a strategic mindset that we attempt to live by and share with other Christians.

We are Reed and Elizabeth Hewitt, a husband and wife team that lives in South Texas. For our day jobs, we are Communications Consultants. In 2013, we felt led to create LivingStrategically.com to utilize our backgrounds in education and communications to influence our culture for Christ.



Our foundational verses are found in Ephesians 5:15-17:

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

We define *living strategically* as using our time, energy, money, and talents in ways that make an impact for eternity. It is investing our temporal assets to gain eternal dividends. It is acting with great intention and purpose, knowing that one day we will give an account to the Lord for our stewardship of His assets.

We hope you will join us on this journey, as we help you strategically pursue your God-given purpose and make the most of your time on earth. If you'd like to get in touch, email us at info@livingstrategically.com.

Alright y'all, until next time...
keep living strategically!

Reed & Liz Hewitt

*Helping you strategically pursue your God-given purpose.
www.LivingStrategically.com*