

# GODLY AMBITION

Pastor Montgomery | 04 May 2021

According to Google, the word 'ambition' means "a strong desire to do or to achieve something, typically requiring determination and hard work," or "desire and determination to achieve success." The key word in both of these definitions is the word 'desire': a hunger, a thirst, or a wish.

As we have been considering what it means to be God-centered men, we have examined the topics of our *mission* (magnify the goodness of God), our need for *allies* (other Christian men), and the importance of a truly manly *attitude* (not weakness, but meekness). This month, we'll examine the topic of ambition and desire. At the deepest level, for what should we hunger and thirst?

## The Answer of Jesus

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus begins the "Sermon on the Mount" (ch. 5-7) with a list describing the chief attributes of Christian character – what Christians should be like. This list, usually called "The Beatitudes," includes an important statement about what Christians should desire: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied," (Mat. 5.6).

Obviously righteousness is not a physical substance that we can eat or drink. Yet Jesus uses this language to paint a picture: Christians should have a deep desire, as strong as physical hunger or thirst, for righteousness. What does this mean?

In the Bible, righteousness has two dimensions. In the first place, righteousness refers to *a right relationship with our Creator*. A righteous man is one who has met all of the requirements to be accepted by God. In the second place, righteousness refers to *right behavior toward other creatures*. A righteous man is one who treats God's creatures, even his enemies, in a way that pleases God.

Jesus himself gave us the perfect description of righteousness: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets," (Mat. 22.37-40).

From these words we see that righteousness is intimately connected with the notion of love. Yet there is so much confusion surrounding this idea in our society that we must make sure we have the right definition. What does it mean to love God? What does it mean to love others?

In John's Gospel, Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments," (Jn. 14.15). The apostle John explains further: "This is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another," (1 Jn. 3.23). To love God means to live by faith in Jesus: to believe his promises of love and forgiveness, marvel at his goodness, and follow his commands.

The apostle John also instructs us what it means to love others: "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another," (1 Jn. 4.10-11). To love others righteously means to love them as God loved us: never lying about their sins, but being willing to sacrifice for their good.

Putting all this together, what do we see? According to Jesus, our deepest desire should be to bring ourselves and others, indeed all things, "further up and further in" to God's goodness. This isn't just to be our mission, but our *passion* – something for which we hunger and thirst. Is it? If not, why not?

## Testing Our Passion

Why is it that we have so much trouble becoming passionate about anybody or anything beyond ourselves? For those of us who may say, "I don't think like this," C.S. Lewis offers a test. First, think of something that you can do, or have done, really well. Now ask yourself: Could you be just as happy about this thing, if it were done by somebody else?

According to Lewis, the reason this is so difficult is because we have swallowed a deep lie of Satan: "The whole philosophy of Hell rests on recognition of the axiom that one thing is not another thing, and, specially, that one self is not another self. My good is my good and your good is yours. What one gains another loses... 'To be' means 'to be in competition'," (*The Screwtape Letter*).

Do we see the point? Getting passionate about God and others is difficult for us because we have fallen for the devil's deepest lie: *that ultimate reality is rivalry*. As long as we believe this lie, we will never move beyond selfish ambition to genuine passion for God or others. How do we kill the lie?

## God's Person and Passion

The way to kill the deep lie is to take a deep look at God and his gospel. Firstly, we must see that *there is no rivalry in the Trinity*. Think about what this means: there is no reality deeper than God. But the one God is three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This means that ultimate reality is not rivalry, but community. At the very bottom level of existence, one Person's gain is not another Person's loss. Rather, one Person's glory is shared by the other Persons! If this is true among the Persons who are God, is it not also true among us who bear God's image?

Secondly, we must see that *the greatest glory is not in self-protection, but self-giving*. The God who lived in perfect community from all eternity did not protect himself, but rather emptied himself – in order to give us a share of his glory (Phil. 2.6-7, 2 Cor. 8.9). The result of this self-sacrifice was not just our salvation, but greater glory and joy for Jesus himself (Phil. 2.9-11, Heb. 12.2)! If God himself receives greater glory and joy through self-giving for others' good, will it not be the same for us?

Here then is the secret to godly ambition: *expelling rivalry with gospel joy*. If we believe in the Trinity, and if we trust in Jesus, then we already possess the ultimate good – eternal life! Doing all that we can to bring ourselves and others "further up and further in" to this goodness will not decrease our glory or joy, but rather deepen and enrich it.

## Godly Ambition for All of Life

As we embrace true, godly ambition, it transforms every aspect of life. The desire to bring ourselves and others closer to God's goodness is not just theological, but intensely practical. It changes our motivations and challenges our priorities: reminding us that worship is more important than recreation, and people are more important than things. It brings new joy to our work. Why should janitors make bathrooms clean? Why should students study hard? Why should salesmen help people find the right product, rather than maximizing profit? Because in all these ways we show love to God and others; in all these ways we "hunger and thirst for righteousness."

## Comprehension Questions

- According to Jesus, what should each of us desire most of all?
- Why is it so difficult for us to embrace truly godly ambition?

## Application Questions

- Be honest: When others look at you, what would they say you are most passionate about?
- In what areas of your life are you most vulnerable to the "ultimate reality is rivalry" lie?
- What areas of your life will be more joyful as you embrace a passion for God and others?