



Holy Ambition

(Mark 10:35-45)

Bottom Line: Ambition is not wrong, but it must be directed to the proper ends of making much of God rather than ourselves.

Do you consider yourself an ambitious person? Why or why not? What are you ambitious about? What characteristics describe someone who is ambitious?

Read Mark 10:35-45.

The brothers James and John asked Jesus for a special favor. What was it?

What do you think prompted their request? Why do you think it was important for James and John to know whether they could have the seats of honor in Jesus' kingdom?

Power struggles like this one often creep into our relationships. What are power struggles really about?

James and John asked for the places on Jesus' right and left in His glory. In Jewish culture, the seat to the right of a king represented the place of highest honor. The next best place was on the left. The two disciples requested the positions of highest recognition for themselves. The request reveals the true hearts of James and John. They expressed a selfish concern for personal greatness. This desire exposed their shallow, short-sighted spirits. Christians today struggle with the same issues the disciples did. We tend to measure our worth by the honors we gather or positions we hold, and this creates power struggles and tensions in our relationships. God does not share that perspective. He determines your greatness based on your willingness to practice self-sacrifice after the pattern of Jesus. How you serve other people matters to Him.

Read verse 41 again and note how the other disciples responded to James and John's request. Why would this have angered them?

What does Jesus' response to all of the disciples—those who asked for power and those who got angry at the request—teach us about relationships?

In these verses, Jesus shows us how God's view of relationships differs directly from that of the world. Jesus called for leadership from the bottom up instead of from the top down. The life of Christ is one of service, as He Himself modeled for us. He said those who want to be first or great, do so by becoming a slave. Believers serve at God's direction and work to advance His cause, rather than serve out of their own motives. Throughout His ministry, Jesus modeled humble service to others without any attempt to lift up Himself. Furthermore, Jesus willingly offered up His life to set people free from the devastation of sin. Thus, through self-sacrificial service, Jesus advanced the lives of others. If we hope to glorify God in our relationships, we have to work to put others before ourselves. No one wins in a power struggle.



Read Mark 9:33-35 and compare to this passage. Does Jesus condemn ambition? Why or why not?

What's interesting in both of these passages is that Jesus doesn't rebuke the disciples for wanting to be great, He doesn't stifle their ambition. Instead, He reorients their incorrect understanding of *how* to be great. He shows them the way to true greatness. It's not a sin to want to do great things for God, but it is a sin when we take our cues of what "great things" are from the world rather than from God's Word and pursue those rather than what God has called us to.

What are some things the world tells us are great things to pursue? How do these contrast to how the Bible describes what the pursuit of our lives should be?

What is so off-putting about an unambitious person? Are unambitious Christians harmful or helpful to the church?

Read 1 Timothy 3:1-8. How does verse 1 affect how we view the rest of the verses?

Although Paul is describing to Timothy the qualifications of an elder in the church, these are qualities that all of us, men and women alike, should strive to pursue. In other words, we should be *ambitious* about becoming like the person Paul describes here. These may seem like little things, but Amy Carmichael said it well: "A little thing is a little thing. But faithfulness in little things is a great thing."

If you want to be great, pursue the holy ambition of being great in the Kingdom of God, Jesus and Paul have both shown us ways to do this. Don't be slothful or lackadaisical in your pursuit of greatness. Pursue greatness with all your might. Put your ambition to it's proper use: to make much of God in any and every endeavor you pursue. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

APPLICATION

What are you ambitious about in regard to physical accomplishments? (Reading, writing, serving, working, etc.). What are you ambitious about in regard to character development? (The list of qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 might be helpful to look over again).

Do you lack ambition? Why? Do you feel incapable? Do you feel ill-equipped? Perhaps joining a Discipleship Group or pursuing accountable friendships will help. Do you think that the Lord may be calling you to either of these options?

How can we all help one another with our holy ambitions? How can we assist one another with our character development? How can we assist one another with pursuing the goals that the Lord has given us?