

“Rescuing Ambition”

Dave Harvey

Kindle Notes by Dave Kraft

It's the instinctual motivation to aspire to things, to make something happen, to have an impact, to count for something in life. Humility, rightly understood, shouldn't be a fabric softener on our aspirations. True humility doesn't kill our dreams; it provides a guardrail for them. When we become too humble to act, we've ceased being biblically humble. “One way to clarify your spirituality,” says Donald Whitney, “is to clarify your ambition.” We're pursuers—we go after things we value.

When all is said and done, what we actually go after is what truly matters to us. This ability to perceive, prize, and pursue is part of our essential humanness, and it's the essence of ambition. Your pursuits—whatever they may be—reveal what you prize. What we pursue will ultimately define us. It will claim our time, absorb our resources, and shape our future. The biblical word for selfish ambition portrays those who, like prostitutes or corrupt politicians, demean themselves for gain.

John Chrysostom, one of the great preachers of the early church, once said, “Men who are in love with applause have their spirits starved not only when they are blamed offhand, but even when they fail to be constantly praised.” But among all the passions which mislead, endanger, and harass the mind, none is more hostile to its peace, none more blind, none more delirious than the love of distinction. Whether it's blatant or subtle, selfish ambition always leads me to the same place: I become a glory thief, swiping attention from God and demanding greatness for myself.

Apart from God, our quest for greatness is often a search for approval. I want to be applauded and esteemed. I live for praise. I attempt great things because I crave being celebrated. I no longer live for approval; I live from approval. We no longer live ambitious for approval, but we act ambitious because we have approval

Waiting cultivates patience. Waiting redefines our definition of productivity. Waiting is often God's reorientation program aimed at our definition of success.

There's a verse in Scripture that hijacked my brain a few years ago and stays there, If our understanding of doctrine creates passivity toward God's empowering presence or cools the hot embers of our ambition, we've misunderstood God's sovereignty. The greatest ambitions are realized paradoxically on the path of humility. Our willingness to make others a success is a great measure of the purity of our ambitions.

Wherever there's a gift, there's a limit. We assume that what's effective in one season is effective for all time. Methods become monuments. When we become too humble to aspire, we've stopped being humble.

Humility should never be an excuse for inactivity. Our humility should harness our ambition, not hinder it. When our desires go unfulfilled and disappointment begins to define us, something else is afoot. It's called discontentment.

Contentment means being satisfied and at peace with God's will in all situations. It's a state of the soul where your desires conform to wherever you find yourself. Since Paul's ambitions were not selfish, he could live with them unfulfilled.

Contentment is what happens when godly ambition triumphs over selfish ambition. Learning to live contentedly when we don't have what we desire is one powerful antidote to selfish ambitions. When praise comes our way, does it make us more humble or hungry for more praise? The abounding ambitions that have been realized in your life are God's doing—and so are the ambitions that have been laid low. All are God's doing. Contentment comes as we satisfy the fierce ambition to move higher by reaching lower. The individual Christian simply cannot understand his ambition in purely individual terms. Things nowadays are different.

Our sense of community has been largely lost, or maybe overwhelmed by the power of self. John Calvin once wrote, "Ambition has been, and still is, the mother of all errors, of all disturbances and sects." To be audacious is to be bold or daring, fearless, courageous, intrepid, dauntless, venturesome. Let your ambition get you off the bench and into the game. I affirm the value of devotion by remembering that my identity is in Christ, not in my ministry, position, calling, or the approval of man. My greatest joy and fulfillment is to live as his servant for the glory of his name.

I affirm the value of **humility** by encouraging the men around me to help me assess my strengths and weaknesses of both character and gifting, and working with them to position me for the best benefit of the church and the mission of the gospel.

I affirm the value of **honesty** by committing to sharing my opinions in a way that to the best of my understanding is humble and constructive—and in the same manner to also share any struggles I have with the team, its members, or its decisions.

I affirm the value of **integrity** by taking responsibility to open my life and my family to evaluation and care.

I affirm the value of **accountability** by committing to lay my life before the team in light of the biblical qualifications for ministry. I recognize and affirm that the responsibility of evaluating my qualifications is the responsibility of the church and its leaders.

I affirm the value of **faithfulness** by looking for, praying for, and—where possible—training and promoting my ultimate replacement in ministry so the church may continue to grow and mature into future generations.

I affirm the value of **unity** by acknowledging that I will seek to do all I can to represent the values of team ministry in the local church while I'm serving in vocational ministry, and to continue doing so if and when that service ever ends.