

Ambition and the Kingdom

MATTHEW 6:31-33

Therefore do not worry, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear?" **32**For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. **33**But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and **all these things will be given to you as well.**

MARK 10:41-45

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. **42**So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. **43**But it is not so among you; but **whoever wishes to become great among you** must be your servant, **44**and **whoever wishes to be first among you** must be slave of all. **45**For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

LUKE 14:7-11

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. **8**'When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; **9**and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, "Give this person your place", and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. **10**But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, "**Friend, move up higher**"; **then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you.** **11**For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves **will be exalted.**'

I TIMOTHY 3:1

The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task.

JAMES 3:13-16

Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. **14**But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. **15**Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. **16**For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind.



What do each of these passages have to say about ambition?

Ambition and the Kingdom



AMBITION	SELFISH AMBITION	GODLY AMBITION
Impact	<input type="text"/> results: the <input type="text"/> of success— money, status, security	<input type="text"/> results: the <input type="text"/> of success—Justice, compassion, service, improvement, knowledge.
Honour	Draw attention <input type="text"/> and seek places of honor . You will <input type="text"/>	Draw attention <input type="text"/> and seek places of service : God will reward you.

EXAMPLES OF AMBITION	SELFISH AMBITION	GODLY AMBITION
Ambition to be a noted authority in a field of medicine		
Ambition to be a hero to my spouse and kids		
Ambition to be the Most Valuable Player (MVP) in a professional sports league		
Ambition to be honored as the greatest servant in my church		
Ambition to be most improved player on my high school sports team		
Ambition to be voted "Most Likely to Succeed" in my graduating class		
Ambition to be a frequent respected news commentator in the media		
Ambition to write the newspaper story that breaks the next "Watergate" government corruption scandal		
Your example here:		



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Matt 6: There is something worth really striving for: The Kingdom of God

Mark 10:

- Jesus doesn't judge them for wanting to be great. He assumes they want to be great. His teaching about servanthood doesn't apply to them if they don't.
- He gives them advice on how to be great. Don't be like the Gentiles! Rather serve!
- He uses himself as a model. Jesus wanted to be great too! He was great through great servanthood.

Luke 14: Jesus doesn't chastise the Pharisees for wanting to be great. He simply gives them a more shrewd strategy for achieving greatness. Everyone in the room wants honor—Jesus teaches them how to find lasting honor.

1 Timothy 3: We tend to be uncomfortable with the notion of aspiring to leadership. Yet Paul does not chastise this aspiration—he directs and informs it.

James 3: The only passage here that speaks about “selfish ambition” which itself acknowledges that the adjective selfish is not redundant—there is another kind of godly ambition

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Ambition in scripture is not painted as wholly bad or selfish, though in our context it often is seen simply as negative.

AMBITION	SELFISH AMBITION	GODLY AMBITION
Impact	Extrinsic results: the rewards of success—money, status, security	Intrinsic results: the value of success—Justice, compassion, service, improvement, knowledge.
Honour	Draw attention to yourself and seek places of honor. You will be humbled.	Draw attention to God at work and seek places of service: God will reward you.

1. Ask people to rank these in order from most to least godly.	2. Then ask them to think about and discuss how each ambition could be seen in a selfish or godly way.	
EXAMPLES OF AMBITION	SELFISH AMBITION	GODLY AMBITION
Ambition to be a noted authority in a field of medicine	Envy of others' success, denial of the success of others	Desire to learn, to teach, to deepen understanding and knowledge, to press ahead the frontier of science, to understand God's creation
Ambition to be a hero to my spouse and kids	Desire to be the noted as a great dad or great husband. Envy of parents who seem to be able to "have it all"	Desire to be honored by the three that really matter—my wife and children, for the sake of the kinds of relationships that they will be able to have one day
Ambition to be the Most Valuable Player (MVP) in a professional sports league	Desire to work hard and to be seen as working hard for a team, to be the critical player—envy of others who make critical contributions	Desire to be valuable to a team, truly valuable, by bringing natural ability, skill and effort together to make a great contribution
Ambition to be honored as the greatest servant in my church	Envy of other "servants" who are honored but who don't serve nearly as much or consistently (or without whining)	Recognition of the ways that I am built to serve, sometimes publicly, sometimes behind the scenes, and grateful for the chances to do so
Ambition to be most improved player on my high school sports team	Eager to be seen as improving, envious of the perception that others have improved. Tempted to use short-cuts, like performance-enhancing drugs.	Eager to actually improve, to better your time, your weight, your endurance. Sees individual improvement as a contribution to the overall team effort.
Ambition to be voted "Most Likely to Succeed" in my graduating class	Eager to be known as a very successful person, academically, socially, a "real go-getter", willing to take go the extra mile to make good impressions	Eager to succeed, willing to go the extra mile to get the job done right or to bring the effort together for a successful accomplishment of any task, regardless of who notices.
Ambition to be a frequent respected news commentator in the media	Eager to be seen as competent in some field of endeavor and noted and appreciated for timely and helpful commentary.	Eager to serve the wider public with one's knowledge built up over a lifetime of excellence & diligence in some field of endeavor.
Ambition to write the newspaper story that breaks the next "Watergate" government corruption scandal	Eager to be able to be known as the person who broke the story, and to profit from it both professionally and financially.	Eager to tell a story that no one is paying attention to but that addresses real corruption and abuse of power in ways that hurt those at the bottom of society.
Your example here:	Feel no need to cover all the examples—examine a couple of them to help people get a feel for the difference.	