

James Series Going Deeper

5- Day Devotional

Week 10, Day 3: Surrendering Selfish Ambition

Primary Verse:

Reading: Matthew 6:5-15; Philippians 2:1-11

Scripture Focus

“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”

James 3:16

Devotional

If bitter jealousy says, **“Why them and not me?”** then selfish ambition says, **“How do I get ahead for me?”**

Selfish ambition is the self-centered drive to promote myself, prove myself, protect myself, or get what I want, even if it damages others or dishonors God.

Ambition itself is not always sinful. There is such a thing as holy ambition. Paul said, **“We make it our aim to please him.”** The issue is not desire, diligence, excellence, leadership, or drive. The issue is what sits at the center of the desire.

Godly ambition asks:

How can I glorify God?

How can I obey Christ?

How can I serve others?

How can I build His kingdom?

Selfish ambition asks:

How can I be seen?

How can I be respected?

How can I be right?

How can I win?

How can I increase my influence?

How can I protect my image?

How can I make my life work the way I want it to work?

Jesus confronts selfish ambition directly in the Lord's Prayer.

He teaches us to pray:

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

That prayer reorders the entire human heart.

God is Father. God is in heaven. God's name is holy. God's kingdom is first. God's will is supreme.

That means life is not ultimately about my name, my kingdom, my will, my platform, my dreams, my comfort, my success, or my control.

Selfish ambition makes me the main character. Prayer puts God back at the center.

This is why Philippians 2 is the perfect cure for selfish ambition. Paul says:

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”

Then he points us to Jesus.

Jesus did not grasp. Jesus did not strive. Jesus did not use His position to serve Himself. Though He was in the form of God, He humbled Himself, took the form of a servant, and became obedient to the point of death on a cross.

The opposite of selfish ambition is not passivity. It is Christlike humility.

It is not having no desire. It is desire surrendered to God.

It is not refusing leadership. It is leadership shaped by servanthood.

It is not burying your gifts. It is using your gifts for God's glory and others' good.

James is warning us because selfish ambition always produces disorder. When self is on the throne, relationships become tools, truth becomes a weapon, ministry becomes a platform, leadership becomes control, and conflict becomes a way to win.

But when Christ is on the throne, ambition is purified. We begin to desire what He desires. We begin to seek His kingdom. We begin to use our lives to serve instead of strive.

Today's Reflection

Where are you most tempted to make yourself the center of the story?

Are there places where you are using good things — ministry, leadership, work, influence, or truth — to promote yourself?

What would it look like to surrender your ambition to the kingdom and will of God today?

Today's Prayer

Father, forgive me for every place where I have made life about my name, my kingdom, and my will. Teach me to pray and live like Jesus taught us. Let Your name be honored, Your kingdom come, and Your will be done in my life. Purify my ambition and make me a servant like Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.

Today's Action Step

Pray the Lord's Prayer slowly today. After each phrase, pause and surrender one specific area of your life back to God.