

LETTING GO OF SELF-AMBITION

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PHILIPPIANS 2:3

It was the most important speech of my life. Well, at least it felt like it at the time. I was a freshman in high school, and I had decided to run for class president. My ambitions of being an all-star high school baseball player had been flushed down the toilet the previous summer when I didn't make the team. Naturally, I had to redirect my ambitions elsewhere. If I couldn't excel athletically, maybe I could excel somewhere else—like student council. So I spent hours and hours preparing an all-important campaign speech. And I made some great promises about my desire to serve the student body and seek their good and make a difference in the community. Of course, I had no idea how I would do those things, but that didn't matter, because that wasn't really why I was running.

My ambition to run had nothing to do with anyone but me. I was looking for a place to be great. The ambition for success didn't die when I was cut from the baseball team, it just got redirected to something else. That's kind of the human way, isn't it? Always looking to get ahead, to stand out, to be set apart. Tim Keller described this human tendency, using the words of Jeremiah 45:5 (KJV), as seeking "great things for thyself." This phrase in Jeremiah is followed by a warning: "seek them not." It's a pithy little statement, "seek great things for thyself? Seek them not." It's easy to say, harder to believe, and harder still to live out. Isn't it good to work hard and

succeed? Isn't it good to accomplish things with the lives that we have been given? Isn't it good to have goals and ambitions? What could ever compel us to let go of selfish ambition?

Unsurprisingly, we have nowhere better to look than to the person of Jesus. "Though he was in the form of God," he is the one who "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:6-7, ESV). Jesus possesses all the greatness this world has to offer. He is God, and he is worthy of all the praise and success and admiration and fame and glory that we are constantly trying to get for ourselves.

And yet, he emptied himself and took on the humble form of an infant born into poverty. In the incarnation we see Jesus lowering himself and seeking great things for us. He became nothing so that we could have everything. We can only let go of selfish ambition when we realize that in him we have all the greatness we could ever desire. In response to Christ's self-emptying love, we can let go of our striving for glory or fame or worldly success and redirect that ambition to the love and service of others.
midst of your sadness.

PRAYER

Father we are a proud and selfish people. Our hearts are always looking out for our own good, our own names, and our own greatness. Help us to take on the heart and mind of Jesus, to become servants who seek the good and greatness of others more than ourselves. Sanctify our ambitions to strive for your glory. Show us even this day how we can serve someone else in your name. Amen.



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