

## **Ambition for Christ**

**“Act Like Men” series, Mark 12:28-31 – Isaac Hydoski – November 12, 2010**

**Main Idea:** More than just feeling ambition for Christ, we must be centered on loving God with our whole being and loving others.

Before we get started, I'd like to share a disclaimer: something is about to happen that I don't think anyone would have ever anticipated; the guy who is about to preach to you about ambition is a former delinquent, a lazy, do-nothing, and high school drop-out. This is both funny to me and remarkable, because the life of this lost guy shows what God can do, and speaks to the power of the new life we share in Jesus Christ.

Men, if you haven't noticed we live in a world where everything around us seems important; the talking heads on TV tell us what's urgent news (even though it's different every day), political pundits tell us that this election cycle is the most important in all history, our bosses tell us we have to finish this project on time or our jobs will be moved to Timbuktu, teachers tell us we have to do well on this exam or we'll fail and our lives will amount to nothing, our wives tell us we have to take a vacation soon or she's going to go crazy, our friends tell us we have to see this or that movie because the special effects are amazing, and our pastors tell us we need to be reading our Bibles or we won't be growing. We're constantly bombarded with messages that demand our attention or clamor to be the priority of our lives, and it's easy to be ruled by the loudest or most urgent voice in our lives. Since we're all being pulled in so many different directions, how do we process all these seemingly competing priorities? How do we determine which is the priority of our lives, which deserves the most commitment of our time, energy and thought?

These are critical questions, and sorting through 'apparently' competing priorities can become a wearying task and an overwhelming one. We can begin to grow so weary that we drift into a laziness that doesn't engage any of the important priorities of life. So how do we prioritize? Do we listen to loudest voice, the most persistent voice, or the most passionate voice? There's an alternative; God's voice. Sometimes it's not the loudest or most demanding, but God's voice in the Scriptures is a consistently powerful one that quietly calls us to what should be the focus and the priority of our lives -which everything else fits into.

### **Mark 12:28-31**

*[28] And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" [29] Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. [30] And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all*

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*your mind and with all your strength.’ [31] The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*

In this passage a theologian of the day is essentially asking Jesus: what’s most important, and what should we be shaping our lives around? Jesus’ answer is simple, profound, powerful, and completely life-changing. He answers the man with this verse from Deuteronomy 6, he summarizes what should become the priority of our lives, and he says *“there is no greater commandment than these.”*

Jesus is saying nothing is more important than loving God and loving others with all our being. There is no greater commandment, and there is no greater priority for any of us. This is something easily grasped but also easily ignored or trumped by louder, more urgent, passionate desires and outside voices. Friend, what seems urgent isn’t necessarily most important, and what we’re most passionate about may not be the most important either.

There are two assumptions that I’m making about all of us here today;

1. You already have priorities that you’re pursuing whether you realize it or not, and there’s a framework functioning in your mind that dictates how you respond, make decisions, and spend your time.
2. The controlling priority of your life is something you have ambition for.

A common definition for *ambition* is ‘*an eager desire for the attainment of something*’. To be ambitious, you pursue something, work at it, seek it, try to attain it, and have goals related to it. You may not even recognize that a controlling priority will have an accompanying ambition, but it’s there if you look for it. Friends, the point is; we’re all ambitious for something, but the question is: are you ambitious for the right things?

Take a moment to consider the controlling priority you’re ambitious for? Think about what you spend the most time doing, what you spend the most time thinking about, what you spend the most work trying to attain or accomplish?

You’ll probably find most of these things are not necessarily bad but on the contrary are really good; a career, family, kids, studies, friendships, or maybe even a God-given blessing like rest. These things are all valid and important, but when they begin to swerve us away from the greatest commandment of loving God and loving others we begin to stray from God’s priority for us. However good these priorities are when they become untethered from God’s priority we begin the slow inevitable drift away from the very thing that should inform, shape, and control our ambitions for what we work for, pray for, and desire everyday of our lives: a passionate, ambitious love for God and people!

Ambitions untethered from God’s priorities can often become distorted by self-centered goals or create an unhelpful tension between competing priorities.

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For the believer in Jesus Christ we need to allow the greatest commandment - God's priority for us- to define our priorities. Ambition to love God and people should be the fuel and motivation for all our priorities. We need to stop creating false dichotomies in our minds of competing goals we're ambitious for; it's not one or the other, and we need to stop being overwhelmed by thoughts of, 'I can't be ambitious for everything'. For the Christian life's about one thing and it's this paradigm of one thing that should be the fuel in all of our roles and secondary priorities. Everything we desire or are called to; our responsibilities, goals, and attainments, should be fueled, motivated, and defined by one ambition and priority: to love God with all our being!

Tonight I'd like to call us to a singular ambition that shapes, informs, and defines all other things we're seeking in our roles as men, husbands, fathers, students, employees, friends, and leaders. Based on Mark 12, ambition for the Christian should be *an eager desire to love God with all our being, and to see the glory of God in Christ grasped and embraced by witnesses*. Believers are to have an ambition for one thing: loving God. This ambition will be expressed in many different ways in our lives by how we love God and love others.

To focus on this singular ambition, I want to begin in perhaps an obvious place; learning how to be ambitious for Christ as men and how to express that ambition based on our roles, because knowing our roles is foundational to being ambitious in those roles.

### **1. Be ambitious for Christ as a man (be ambitious *for your role*)**

As men there should be a particular manner by which we demonstrate and live out this ambition, because it's inherent of who we are and how God has made us. Genesis 1:26-27:

*[26] Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." [27] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

From this passage we learn that God created us to be His image bearers. We have been made to carry our Creator's likeness, to be demonstrating the characteristics of our maker in the same way children tend to be image bearers physically, emotionally, and spiritually of their parents. As image bearers we not only resemble God in our capacity for reason and intelligence, but we also resemble Him in our ability to form relationships and a conscious sense of morality.

Verse 27 gets more specific; He's created us as male and female image-bearers. Both men and women are given the same mandates to exercise authority

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(dominion) and live with a subdued control over our lives as image bearers or imitators of God. But we do this with some distinction - as *male and female*. This distinction made by God, and laid out in the first pages of scripture signals to us there should be some differences between how men and women will be image bearers. This distinction of roles is one that we should not ignore, and more than this we should be determinedly embracing these distinctions.

He's created you and I as men, therefore we should be ambitious for Christ in particularly masculine ways as image bearers. So as *men* not just as people, we are to exercise a subduing rule and authority over our own lives and circumstances to the world around us. This sounds hard, doesn't it? And it is hard, but we shouldn't be surprised by that.

After the fall one of the consequences God brought for sin in Genesis 3:17-19 is difficulty in fulfilling our God ordained role as men, "cursed is the ground...in pain you shall eat of it...by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread". Sin has brought difficulty in fulfilling our mandate, and we experience resistance both internally and externally. Why do you think it's so common that we as men struggle with passivity, laziness, or indifference? It's because the immediate and most obvious affect of sin on men is resistance to what God has called us to be as men.

Passivity is one of the most insidious of sins we can engage in because it distorts, twists, and lies about the God we're created to be imaging. As men, we are lying about the God we're called to be like when we; impassively allow others to drift into sin, when we don't actively train our children to fear the Lord, and when we don't supply the spiritual care and protection our families need. We lie about the God we're called to be like when we passively value selfish comfort instead of embracing risk for the cause of God in the church and world. We lie about God when we don't provide the leadership and sacrificial servant hood that the church needs. We lie about who God is when we embrace passivity in our small groups and don't take the initiative to care for and help others grow in maturity.

Our call to be ambitious for Christ as men must involve resisting passivity and laziness, and embrace our mandate to be image bearers of God as men! He's called us off the couch, and from the safety of the back row to the front; the front of our families, the front of the church, and the front of the battle. Men, He's called us to be leading others in the type of image bearing Jesus Christ demonstrated for us.

The front line isn't a place of prestige or honor; it's a place of sacrifice, difficulty and pioneering hardship. It's a place where we absorb the first wave of attack and endure it as a means to protect and care for those behind us. It's a place where we cut the first path through the tangled confusion of trial and hardship, so that those we're caring for have someone to follow. And it's a place where we

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give ourselves, our energies, our time, and our very lives for the benefit of others and to the glory of God.

Brothers, we're called to the line. As men, God is calling us to front lines as His image bearers so that those we are leading and caring for have someone to follow. Yes, this is hard but this is who He's made us to be and He calls us to act.

- Endeavor to bring order and care to every relationship, and every role we have as men, as husbands, dads, employees, friends, church members, students, or workers. Exercise authority-over and subdue sinful nature, possessions, gifts, careers, and time in order to benefit others and please God. This is a carrying out of Mark 12:28-31.
- Be ambitious for loving God and loving others by how we image God as men.

Although these actions are difficult and sometimes painful, I want to point you to the reward as well. We aren't following a fallen image bearer any longer, we're following the perfect image bearer; Jesus Christ, the second Adam. He has come and He has gone to the front line of the battle for us. He has pioneered the path we're to walk so we can follow. He has experienced the violent hatred of our enemy in order to deliver us. He has endured the withering anger of God towards sin so we can experience peace with God and deliverance from our enemy. He rose victorious from the battle over sin and Satan, and redeemed us in the process. It's Him that we're following. It's Him that is leading us, caring for us, and protecting us. He's become the perfect man, the perfect image-bearer as the God made flesh and He's making us more and more into His perfect image! 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 preaches this to us;

*[17] Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. [18] And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

Becoming like Christ in His perfect image-bearing is our ultimate destination. We won't be a mere reproduction of image bearing masculinity; we will be like Jesus in every way, perfect as image-bearing men who walk in love, who've overcome sin of passivity, and love of pleasure and comfort, and who've become men who sacrifice, lead, care for, and protect out of a love for God and others.

Friends, embrace this work God is doing in you now. Embrace an eager desire to know and love Jesus, so you can be like Him and see Him exalted. Be ambitious; eager and determined to be a man who images Christ to a fallen world, and delight in the blessings that will come to you! J.C. Ryle writes these encouraging words;

“None have so much enjoyment of Christ as those who are ever zealous for His glory,-jealous over their own walk,-tender over their own consciences,-full of anxiety about the soul of others,-and ever watching, working, laboring, striving, and toiling to extend the knowledge of Jesus Christ upon earth. Such men live in the full light of the sun, and therefore their hearts are always warm. Such men water others, and therefore they are watered themselves. Their hearts are like a garden daily refreshed by the dew of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>1</sup>

Strive to be a man who loves Christ and loves others, and be ambitious for Christ as a man. Make this the aim of your life, your singular passion that affects, influences, and defines all your other roles.

## **2. Be ambitious for Christ in your many roles**

We must be ambitious to love Christ as men, and we must be ambitious for Christ in the many roles we possess as men. We inhabit many different roles, and our ambition for Christ must find expression in these varied roles. Whether our role is a leader in the church or family, a husband, father, brother, friend, student, employee, or employer an ambition for Christ must be expressed. We mustn't mistake ambition for Christ in our roles as an “add-on” to our roles, our ambition for Christ should rather define our roles and how we function in them. So there should be accompanying ambition to love God and love others in how we function in our roles. This gospel-motivated priority of loving God provides the needed definition of how we should function in these roles; we love others in them as an expression of loving God!

Let me demonstrate this through Paul's life, he writes in Romans 15:15-21;

*[15] But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God [16] to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. [17] In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. [18] For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience-by word and deed, [19] by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God-so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ, [20] and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, [21] but as it is written, “those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Ryle, J.C. *Practical Religion*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009. Print.

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What we're seeing in this passage is a connection between the unique role Paul was called to and an accompanying ambition for Christ in that role. Paul's not just type-A guy who is always brimming with ideas, excitement and zeal, his ambition wasn't manufactured from personal desire or for personal gain, his ambition for Christ was rooted in his unique call to be a minister of the gospel to the Gentiles. Notice Paul says, because of the "grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles", he was teaching and proclaiming Christ as a minister or apostle to the Gentile world, and he was given grace by God to function in this unique role. Looking at v.19-20, we see because of this call Paul preached the gospel to the Gentiles throughout the Mediterranean world. But Paul isn't satisfied there, because of his call he makes it his ambition to, "preach the gospel where Christ hasn't been named". He wants to keep going.

We see a beautiful, amazing, compelling, and powerful joining of role & ambition in Paul. His unique call and role as an apostle was shaped by his ambition for Christ. And what a glorious affect it's had. Paul made it his desire -an eager ambition- to preach Christ to the far limits of the Roman Empire, and this is what ambition for Christ in your unique roles will do. It will drive you to be ambitious in your roles!

This kind of undivided ambition in your role is beautiful to behold but it also can be costly. Read 2 Corinthians 11:24-29, and 12:10. An ambition for Christ in your roles will lead to joyful setting-aside of personal safety; to take on risk and give up comforts and prerogatives, because you have an ambition for Christ and ambition to see others love and exalt Jesus. Does this scare you at all? Friends, it scares me a little but this is a beautiful expression of personal risk, self-denial, and of Christ-following that we're all called to as men.

Let's embrace an ambition for Christ in our own unique roles which God has given us! We're not all called to be apostles -this is where we differ from Paul- but that doesn't mean this text bears no meaning for our lives. Like Paul, we ought to allow God's call of us -to be His image bearers- to be shaped by an ambitious desire to love God with all our being, and to see the glory of God in Christ grasped and embraced by others.

Brothers, my goal in all this is not to see you simply be an ambitious and proactive man, but it's to see you determinedly take up your call as a man: to love God with all your heart and long to see the glory of God grasped and embraced by others in how you live in your roles! Make your ambition for Christ to be known so He is loved, and worshipped in your life and those in your family, school, workplace, neighborhood and church.

Whatever your unique roles as men may be; let them demonstrate an ambition for Christ that loves others in risky and comfort-shattering ways. Let's uphold a firm commitment to embrace an ambition for Christ in our roles. Men, I encourage you to consider and pray about ways an ambition for Christ can be

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expressed in your life, and expressed in your role as a father, husband, leader, brother, friend, worker, or student. Ask yourselves:

- How will I express my ambition for Christ in my roles, in a way that benefits others?
- How can I support and encourage others in their ambitions for Christ?

In these roles don't limit your ambition to simply be a good dad, a hard worker, a faithful husband, or a student with good grades. Refrain from lowering your ambition to just getting good grades, a good job, a good wife and house, or to have good children and a good retirement. We are called to much a higher standard.

We are imaging Christ in our lives as men, so show Christ to the world and to your friends and family. Make Him known by how you love Him zealously. Make Him known so He can be loved and exalted by your wives, kids, friends, co-workers, families, neighbors, and friends. An ambition for Christ in your roles will transform you, and bring so much good to the church and the world. The outcome of such ambition is:

- A passion for holiness in you and others (the antithesis of selfishness and self-living)
- An eagerness to see the lost saved
- A love and zeal for people

“There is a sense in which it may be said that zeal is contagious. Nothing is more useful to the professors of Christianity than to see a real live Christian, a thoroughly zealous man of God...he makes them feel their own sleepiness. He makes their own great darkness visible...It is a blessed truth that one zealous Christian can do much good. Yes: one single zealous man in a town,-one zealous man in a congregation,-one zealous man in a society,-one zealous man in a family, may be a great, a most extensive blessing.”<sup>2</sup>

This is where we see the wisdom and providential hand of God in bringing much good to the world and the church. When men eagerly embrace their call as Christ-like image bearers, and ambitiously pursue a love for Christ in their varied roles it will bring transforming affects of gospel love, servant hood, and motivated leadership and protection. This ambitious living will bring about a Christ-like desire to love others even if it means personal risk to yourself. So brothers, be ambitious for Christ as a man in your varied roles. Eagerly desire and work towards loving God with all your being. And to see Jesus Christ known and exalted by others, because that is loving God and loving others.

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<sup>2</sup> Ryle, J.C. *Practical Religion*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009. Print.