



WOW: Word Of the Week

Ambition

November 13, 2024

A personal note. A word to preachers and church leaders. And.... a word for everyone.

What is your ambition? What is the role of ambition in Christian life and service?

Paul was a man on a mission – active, involved, sacrificing, getting much done. His goal was to preach the gospel where Christ's name had not been heard (Rom. 15:20). He was a trailblazer. He traveling widely to proclaim the truth.

Ambition. We also want to make a difference. We want to leave our mark. But motives matter.

Paul's ambition was not selfish. He admonished the Philippians to "do nothing out of selfish desire" (Phil. 2:3). He urged the Thessalonian Christians to "make it your ambition to lead a quiet life" (1 Thess. 4:11).

Ambition is deceptive. Social visibility may make us known while the tasks God has given us in the local church and in our families become secondary. Reaching everybody online easily distracts from reaching specific searching souls all around us. How often does ambition explain why local churches fail to grow?

Over the past year, Jan and I have begun asking ourselves a new set of questions. We are considering how best to step back from extensive, intensive mission and ministry activity. We are developing a plan, looking ahead into a three-year window. We are praying for God's guidance. We anticipate a significant change in the way our lives are organized by the time our 80th birthdays roll around.

As we contemplate our future—how to invest our lives, what we can and should do now, and what we should do next—we are asking about the best use of our time, energy, and lives. How can we glorify God in aging—calm, joyful, focused, encouragers, sharing insights.

The quiet life is coming into clearer focus. Heritage and legacy are serendipitous, byproducts, not the final goal, not sought and attained by ambition. I look back and wonder if I have done a good job in balancing character and competence. How often does our desire to be celebrated and known overwhelm our call to be competent, committed servants where God places us?

You may not be a position to live a life that can be described as the "quiet life." But the question of ambition provides helpful guardrails. Do I work for me or for God? Why do I work so hard? How much of my ambition is selfish? What does the quiet life look like—in my life, in your life, right now? Do we desire that kind of life?

I think I see more clearly. The quiet life is not about how much I work. It is about the calm, joyful, relaxed, peaceful presence of God in my life each day. Times to wait on the Lord, times to serve him gladly in the places he puts me according to the gifts he has given me.

That will be enough!