**Real Ambition**

I am so glad that your Group is working its way deeper into the book of Philippians. Through his Word, our Lord speaks to our hearts, unites us by his Spirit and trains us for a life in Jesus. Thanks for taking the time and opportunity to grow in your faith.

When I started to study this text for this study, I got a big smile on my face, because this is a key text in Philippians as well as instructive for us in understanding Jesus and the manner in which we live together as Christians. So let’s get cooking.

Chapter two of Philippians starts with beautiful language that Paul uses to draw his hearers in. His language is not scolding or producing a sense of guilt. Rather Paul is speaking in kind tones to the people. These are Paul’s people. They have supported him financially and in prayer and been very encouraging of his work. He loved his people and so the words are beautiful and joyful. He describes this church as united in Christ, comforted in Jesus’ love, connected together in fellowship, comforted and compassionate. From the strength of this community Paul calls them to a Real Ambition , to take another step and push forward in their walk of faith.

That’s how community works. Christianity was and is never meant to be lived as a solo event. Following Jesus is about together, us and we. Americans love selfish ambition, the idea of the cowboy riding off into the sunset all on his own. He defeated the enemy and now he’s going on, by himself, to his next skirmish. Not so with Christians. Paul is working on helping an already strong community become stronger. So too in our lives together, we find unity of mind and spirit in contexts like small groups.

In some respects community is a fragile thing. For some they come to community to take and get what they can...selfish ambition. Paul talks about that in terms of looking to our own needs, rather the needs of others. “***3****Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,****4****not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others”* There’s an interesting dynamic in 21st century American Christianity regarding “pious Christian Consumption.” Some people see community as a function of what they can take from other people. This “selfish ambition” leads these kinds of people to be in relationships as long as it suits them and then to bop out when they can’t use the people around them anymore. Paul warns against this.

Another selfish ambition that fractures community is a “me first” mentality. Some want to be in competition with others. Community then becomes a pecking order of who has the most, spends the most, and is the most pious and spiritual. This attitude clobbers community and drives people apart. Paul warns against this type of “vain conceit,” and leads his hearers to a greater way of doing life together, a Real Ambition!

What makes our church tick? What is it that makes for strong relationships? What is it that keeps people together so that in good days there is a sense of we are in this faith life together and can celebrate? What is it in community that allows us to take a lower chair? Not always have our way? What is it that leads us to a way of life that makes us vulnerable and yet resilient?

**[Testimony here]**

Paul now turns his text away from people and to Jesus. He leads us to what is descriptive of Jesus, meaning that which defines who Jesus is and what he does. He leads us also to what is prescriptive for us, which is how we live and behave as Jesus people, He defines Real Ambition for us. In doing this Paul uses a poetic language that has been called, “the Carmen Christi” or the Song of Christ. ***5”****In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:* ***6****Who, being in very nature**God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;****7****rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.****8****And being found in appearance as a man,  he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

Paul describes what Jesus did. He didn’t seize divinity and rank. But he poured himself out completely for his people. Not only did he willing suffer indignity after indignity, but he suffered death. Paul even emphasizes that it was death on a cross. There is no greater life of humility than Jesus’. He made himself low in order to redeem us. Christian community is rooted in Jesus. He forges our hearts with his grace and calls us to himself and together. In his death he takes away all the sins that would keep us from him and demonstrates his love and his power in his death. Jesus was not filled with selfish ambition or vain conceit, but he loved others more than he loved himself and in that love he has called you to community.

Paul also uses Jesus as an example of how we live. Seizing this or that for ourselves is not real ambition. Real Ambition is the way of looking after others. Paul writes, we should consider others better than ourselves and then again that we look not only to our own interests but to the interests of others. The radical way of Christianity, Real Ambition, is the way of you first then me. Your needs first, then mine. Your interests first, then mine. Your life first, then mine. This absolutely wars against the current culture of me me me. Yet the value of loving and caring for people makes us all stronger and our community vital. This is true and REAL ambition.

I remember speaking to a gentleman not long ago and everything he talked about was “I” and “me”. He pushed his opinions. He pushed his experiences. He boasted about his spirituality. He only connected to people as he was related to them. He cared nothing for the others in the conversation and asked nothing about them. Jesus calls us to the opposite. To invest in others emotionally, spiritually, sacrificially and even financially if the need arises, this is the call from the cross. How many of our sentences begin with the big “I.” Maybe that’s one way to think about how much we invest in others and how much we talk about ourselves. Definitely something to think about in your discussion.

Verses 9-11 give us a beautiful picture of how God lifts up. ***9”****Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,****10****that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,****11****and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* He lifted up his son Jesus from humiliation and exalted him to the highest place. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. Jesus knew the cross and the grave, and now he is exalted in the glory of heaven. So every knee now bows and that’s interesting.

Philippi was a town known for having many retired Roman military men. The confession of faith was Cesar is Lord. Each emperor was considered somewhat divine and to be worshiped. In this setting Paul resets the confession from a focus on Cesar to a focus on Jesus. Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus, whose reputation and life outlived all the Cesar’s. He is Lord. Jesus, who humbled himself and died for his people. He is Lord. Jesus who sits in glory. He is Lord. Jesus, who loves you and calls you know REAL ambition, he is the gracious Lord. His love reaches us today and leads us into a joyful community. One that seeks to see Christ’s humility for us so that we can be united in him and have this REAL ambition for our lives. Thanks again for being a part of a group. It’s a joy to share this message with you.