

AMBITION: When It Is Good; When It Is Bad



“4 I wish I were the judge. Then everyone could bring their cases to me for judgment, and I would give them justice!”
5 When people tried to bow before him, Absalom wouldn’t let them. Instead, he took them by the hand and kissed them. 6 Absalom did this with everyone who came to the king for judgment, and so he stole the hearts of all the people of Israel.” 2 Samuel 15:4-6 NLT

- Are you ambitious? What are your greatest ambitions in life?

A woman was appearing before the judge in traffic court. She received a ticket for driving through a red light. She told the judge she was a school teacher and asked for immediate dismissal of her case so she would not be late getting to school. The judge smiled and replied: “So, you are a schoolteacher? I shall finally realize my **lifelong ambition**. I have waited years to have a school teacher in my court. Now, sit down at that table and write, ‘I will not drive through a red light 500 times!’

The dictionary defines *ambition* as: “a strong desire to do or to achieve something, typically requiring determination and hard work.”

The story of Absalom is a story of ambition that went bad. He plotted and schemed to overthrow his father, David, from the throne of Israel. The story of Absalom teaches us lessons about being ambitious, both in good & bad ways.

Central Lesson Ambition Is Good When It Helps Others.

GOOD Ambition - Seeks to **BENEFIT** Others

Paul was ambitious. He wrote: “*My ambition has always been to preach the Good News where the name of Christ has never been heard, rather than where a church has already been started by someone else*” Romans 15:20 NLT.

Paul also wrote: “*This is a trustworthy saying: ‘If someone **aspires** [is ambitious] to be a church leader, he desires an honorable position’*” 1 Timothy 3:1 NLT

Ambition is **good** when it is focused on **helping others**.

BAD Ambition - Is **SELFISH**

The only time the Bible portrays ambition as **bad** is when it is **selfish ambition**.

- Selfish ambition is one of the fruit of the flesh (or desires of the sinful nature) in Galatians 5:19-21 NLT “...²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, **selfish ambition**, dissension, division....”
- Paul wrote that some preachers in his day were preaching from wrong motives: “...*They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely....*” Philippians 1:17 NLT
- James warns against selfish ambition: “*For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind*” James 3:16 NLT.

WHY Absalom’s Ambition Was Wrong

1. Disregard of God’s Revealed **WILL**.

Absalom coveted his father’s throne. God had already chosen and anointed David as king over Israel (2 Samuel 7). Absalom’s desire was clearly a disregard for God’s will. Absalom was living only for self.

The Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary asks: “**For Whose Kingdom Do You Live? ...Absalom was working against God’s design for His people. Absalom wanted to discard God’s design with David and create the world in his own image.... We see the heart of Absalom’s ambition. It was not directed for the glory of God. Absalom’s ambition was to build his own kingdom, not God’s kingdom**” (2 Samuel 15, p.230).

2. Disregard for the Well-Being of **OTHERS**.

Absalom’s ambition had a high price tag. It cost him his family, the destruction of the lives of many others, anguish, and the death of thousands.

LIFE LESSONS from Absalom’s Story

1. Absalom’s story reminds us that - God forgives sin, but the **CONSEQUENCES** often remain.

Absalom’s rebellion stems back to David’s sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah in 2 Samuel 11. “*9 Why, then, have you despised the word of the Lord and done this horrible deed? For you have murdered Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the Ammonites and stolen his wife. 10 From this time on, your family will live by the sword because you have despised me by taking Uriah’s wife to be your own*” 2 Samuel 12:9-10 NLT

2. Bad ambition can lead to **SCHEMING**, deception, and disloyalty.

*“6 Absalom did this with everyone who came to the king for judgment, and so he stole the hearts of all the people of Israel. 7 After **four years**....”* (15:6-7 NLT).

Absalom was deceptively scheming behind his father’s back. He was scheming his plan for over four years (15:7).

3. Betrayal can take place by those you think are the **CLOSEST** to you.

David never suspected his own son, Absalom, would scheme, deceive, and revolt against him. This caused deep anguish for David. “*30 David walked up the road to the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went. His head was covered and his feet were bare as a sign of mourning....*” 2 Samuel 15:30 NLT.

4. Bad ambition can eventually result in a **TRAGIC** ending.

*“6 So the battle began in the forest of Ephraim, 7 and the Israelite troops were beaten back by David’s men. There was a **great slaughter** that day, and **20,000 men laid down their lives.**” ⁴⁵ Ten of Joab’s young armor bearers then surrounded Absalom and **killed him.**” 2 Samuel 18:6-7, 15 NLT.*

Absalom’s plan ended in personal tragedy. He died, as well as more the 20,000 others, in war.

Central Lesson Ambition Is Good When It Helps Others.

- ▶ Accept Christ as your Savior. ▶ As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ. ▶ Invite someone to next Sunday’s study. ▶ Attend a small group. ▶ Read the Bible & journal meaningful verses. ▶ Pray for friends that need Jesus.