

## **Humanistic Ambition Versus Godly Ambition**

### **2 Samuel 1:1-16**

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 6-17-2012

#### **Introduction – ambition is essential, but can also be dangerous**

I wasn't able to verify this, but Donald Trump was recently quoted as saying, "Life is a game and the ultimate scoreboard is money." For some people the ultimate scoreboard is power. For others it is fame, or achievement in sports, or comfort. And for some it might simply be vegging out in front of a TV. But the ultimate scoreboard is really the ambition of your life. Your ambition is what drives your life. It is at the core of what you value. And your ambition should be to please God in your calling. It assumes of course that you know what your calling is.

But strong ambition has always been a distinguishing mark of leadership. All of the great leaders of the Bible were driven by some great ambition. In fact, I believe that it is part of the dominion urge that God has put into humans. We want our lives to count, and the stronger our sense of calling is, the stronger our ambition.

But it is not enough to have the right ambition. Without character and Biblical vision ambition actually becomes dangerous – even with believers. In Luke 22 the disciples had an ambition to be the greatest in Christ's kingdom. And perhaps they even though they were being spiritual and Christocentric. But Christ clearly said that their ambition was no different than the ambition of pagan rulers. Talk about a humiliating rebuke. To want to be greatest in Christ's kingdom smacks of the same self-centeredness of being great in any other scoreboard of life.

And sometimes we can have a hard time sorting through whether we have proper motives when it comes to our ambition. Even David did not always have his ambition directed correctly. For example, in the chapter where he wanted to kill Nabal, Abigail's husband, Satan had moved his burning ambition from a God-centered one to an entirely self-centered one, and he did it just like that. And so it is important that we think about this subject of ambition and ask God to make our ambitions grace driven, governed by God's law, and focused on God's glory. In this chapter, there is a strong contrast between the humanistic ambition of the Amalekite and the godly ambition of David. Both had ambition, but only David's was godly.

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## **I. The Humanistic Ambition of the Amalekite**

### ***A. Questions that should be answered***

#### **1. Why did he switch sides? (v. 1-10)**

I've put down a few questions that help to uncover the humanistic ambition of the Amalekite. The first question is, "Why did he switch sides in verse 2?" There is huge debate among commentators on whether he was one of Saul's soldiers or whether he was a mercenary working for the Philistines. Most believe that he had to have worked for one or the other side. I don't think there is any question on that. So why did he leave either army to go join David? The only conclusion that is logical is that he now thinks David is a more useful tool for advancement than either Saul or the Philistines would be. He didn't have a change of religion. He didn't have a change of loyalties to Amalek. Chapter 4:10 indicates that his scoreboard of life was the same as Donald Trump's.

#### **2. What is motivating his sacrifice and drive? (v. 1-3,13)**

And this bright idea for advancement and riches seemed worth the quick three-day trip down to Ziklag. It seemed worth sacrificing the gold in the crown and the bracelets he got off of Saul. It must have seemed worth it to pile dirt and ashes on his head and make a show of sorrow. Ambition can motivate anyone to make great sacrifices. Earlier he had obviously made a sacrifice when he left his land of Amalek to serve either Saul or the Philistines (one of the two). Just being on the battlefield shows that he was willing to take risk to fulfill his ambition.

People who are ambitious will often go to great lengths and make great sacrifices to get what they want. And in some ways the sacrifices this young man had made may have caused some people to think he was valuable. "Here's a guy of character. Look at the sacrifices he has made!" So people might be puzzled when the New Testament calls this "selfish ambition." How could it be selfish? He has sacrificed a lot. Well, who is the beneficiary of all of his sacrifices? Was he doing it out of love for Saul? Chapter 4:10 denies it. And we will look at that in a moment. Was he doing it out of love for Israel? Again, chapter 4:10 denies it. And furthermore, he abandoned Israel. Was he doing it for the benefit of the Philistines? Clearly not. The only motives that I can see for his sacrifices and his drive are self-centered motives.

Philippians 2:3-5, says, “**Do nothing out of selfish ambition,**” and the Greek word for selfish ambition means to gain influence, position, status, or office through manipulation or unfair means, or to do what is right only for what can be gained, or to be mercenary. James 3:14-16 says that this kind of selfish ambition does not come from God, but is earthly, sensual, and devilish. So his drive could have come from the world, the flesh, or the devil, or all three put together. Where God made Adam and Eve with an ambition to please the Lord, sin perverts that desire and turns godly ambition into selfish ambition.

### 3. Why the “bootlicking” gestures? (v. 2,10)

And point 3 highlights this even more by showing the bootlicking that was going on. I think bootlicking is the more polite term than some of you use. Verse 2 says, “**he fell to the ground and prostrated himself.**” What’s with that? David’s men didn’t do that. New defectors from Israel didn’t do that. In verse 10 he calls David, “**my lord.**” He gives exaggerated recognition because he wants recognition himself. Because he desperately wants to be highly esteemed, he assumes that David wants to be highly esteemed. He misjudged David’s character badly. But bootlicking is a common feature of selfish ambition. Even politicians do it for their constituents, though it is much more subtle.

On March 9, 1832, when Abraham Lincoln was 23 years old and just starting his political career, he said, “Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition. Whether it be true or not, I can say for one that I have no other [ambition] so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men.”<sup>1</sup> He was admitting that his main goal in life was to be esteemed by others. His main driving ambition for getting into politics was to have others think well of him. It was only through the hard knocks of the war and the constant mockery and vilification that he received in office (often deserved) that he began to have his ambitions adjusted, and he eventually came to say the exact opposite. It shows maturity. Toward the end of his life he said, “Don’t worry when you are not recognized, but strive to be worthy of recognition.” There is a big difference between the two. When you are striving for recognition, you have an idol. It’s automatically selfish ambition. But when you do not worry about recognition and simply strive to please God and to be faithful, you will be developing the character that is worthy of

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham Lincoln, Communication to the People of Sangamo County, March 9, 1832, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume 1*, (New York City: The H. Wolff Book Manufacturing Company, for The Abraham Lincoln Association, 1953), p. 8.

recognition, and you will have the character that will keep you from falling into pride when you get that recognition. Paul's greatest ambition in life is stated in 2 Corinthians 5:9, where he says, **"Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him"** (NASB). To *Him*. The test of whether you are doing things to please God or to please men is whether you persevere in doing the right thing even when men are not present. His bootlicking was a symptom of selfish ambition.

#### **4. Why was he previously in the camp of Israel? (v. 3)**

A fourth question is, "Why was he even in the camp of Israel in the first place?" Had he truly converted to the religion of Israel? That was the case with Uriah the Hittite and the Cherethites and Pelethites. But the narrative makes clear that this was not the case with this man. He did not become a Jew. His presence was purely mercenary. If he was a mercenary for Saul, it was only until Saul could no longer serve his ambitions. If he was a mercenary for the Philistines, he was still a mercenary – a man of ambitions who had no loyalties except to himself.

#### **5. Why does he just "happen by chance" to be in the middle of a battlefield? (v. 6)**

In verse 6 he claims that he just happened by chance to be in the middle of a huge battlefield. Extremely unlikely. If you aren't a combatant, you tend to flee from the battlefield. And his presence there as an Amalekite highlights the selfishness of his ambitions no matter which theory you subscribe to. If he *was* a looter stripping the bodies before either side got to them, his ambitions were purely monetary. If he served Saul, he shows his mercenary character by abandoning Saul as soon as a better deal came up. If he served the Philistines, the same conclusion can be reached.

#### **6. Why had he brought things so valuable to David? (v. 10)**

The sixth question is, "Why had he brought things so valuable to David?" This was gold. Was he being generous? No.

#### **7. David sums it up in 4:10**

In chapter 4:10 David interprets this whole passage in these words: **"when someone told me, saying, 'Look, Saul is dead,' thinking to have brought good news, I arrested him and had him executed in Ziklag – the one who thought I would give him a reward for his news."** He obviously wanted more than what that gold was valued for. David interprets the Amalekite's actions as evidence of selfish ambition.

***B. Further evidence that these questions reveal a humanistic ambition***

**1. Was clueless about what drove David (v. 1)**

And this selfish ambition makes for a fun story for any Jew who was reading this. Verse 1 says, “**Now it came to pass after the death of Saul, when David had returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites...**” There is a bit of humor here. An Amalekite is looking for advancement and riches from a man who is devoted to exterminating Amalekites. David was picking up the mantle that Saul had let slide, and he was obeying God’s command to kill all Amalekites at the very time that Saul had possibly hired an Amalekite. And the irony is that Saul, who had been rejected from kingship by God for failing to kill the Amalekites, ends up being killed by an Amalekite. At any rate, this Amalekite was clueless about what drove David. He thought David was like him, a person who used people to get advanced. “And why wouldn’t he value me, if I claim to have killed his chief enemy?”

**2. Was able to make a good show (v. 2)**

In verse 2 the Amalekite puts on a good show:

**2Samuel 1:2 on the third day, behold, it happened that a man came from Saul’s camp with his clothes torn and dust on his head. So it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the ground and prostrated himself.**

No doubt David thought that this show was a bit ludicrous. There was a centuries old hatred that Amalek had toward Israel, and in light of God’s declaration that no Jew could show pity to any Amalekite, this display shows blindness. Selfish ambition can make us blind to danger. Now it is possible that Saul had paved the way for this blindness by hiring Amalekites. He had after all hired and promoted foreigners like Doeg the Edomite. Such people could be manipulated by Saul more easily. If indeed he had been hired by Saul, the Amalekite may have assumed that David was just as self-absorbed as Saul was. But whatever army this young man was a part of, his ambition blinded him to his danger. If you want some cool stories on how ambition can easily blind us, read Shakespeare’s play, Macbeth, or read Shelley’s story, Frankenstein. It is so easy for us to be blinded if we give in to selfish ambition.

### **3. Selfish ambition ambiguously fishes for clues of David's loyalties (v. 3)**

Now, this guy from Amalek is used to feeling his way into how he should react. He is used to playing conversations and reading people's expressions, and then responding appropriately. And I will explain why I believe that. Commentators have pointed out that all the way through these verses he is fishing for reactions from David – trying to get clues as to which side he should be loyal to. He's not certain. Coming mourning was the safest way to come because that could be interpreted in various ways – mourning for Philistine friends who had been killed, mourning for Jonathan, mourning for Israel. He doesn't play his cards all at once. He is looking for reactions and clues.

Verse 3: **“And David said to him, ‘Where have you come from?’ So he said to him, ‘I have escaped from the camp of Israel.’”**  
Commentaries point out that this is very ambiguous. Was he claiming to be a Philistine mercenary who had been captured by the Israelites, and who had escaped from their camp? Or was he on the side of the Israelites and escaping from the Philistines who had overrun the camp of Israel? Commentators point out that it is deliberately vague. He gives enough to try to elicit a reaction from David and perhaps get information that will give more clues.

### **4. More fishing for clues of David's loyalties (v. 4)**

But he finds David to be a hard guy to read. David is used to playing his cards close to his chest. He has after all spent sixteen months (1 Sam. 27:7) in Philistine borders pretending to be a friend of Achish. So I am sure that David has a non-committal expression on his face. Then David tosses the ball back into the Amalekite's hands to see what information he could get. Verse 4:

**2Samuel 1:4 Then David said to him, “How did the matter go? Please tell me.” And he answered, “The people have fled from the battle, many of the people are fallen and dead, and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also.”**

He is probably hoping to see what kind of reaction he can get from David on the news of these deaths. Now on David's part, he's not sure who this young man is either. Is he on the side of the Philistines? Does he know that David went up with Achish to battle against Israel? Why has he come to me? Or was this young man working for Saul, like Doeg the Edomite? He needs more information:

**5. Still not certain of David's loyalties, he ambiguously tells more of the story, but tries to cover his bases (vv. 5-10a)**

Verse 5: **“So David said to the young man who told him, ‘How do you know that Saul and Jonathan his son are dead?’”** So the young man has to venture more information, but he is still very cagey. In fact, commentators point out that he changes his story slightly. He had earlier said that he escaped from the camp of the Israelites, but look at what he says in verse 6: **“As I happened by chance *to be* on Mount Gilboa...”** Woah! Woah! Woah! Just happened to be there by chance? That's a little bit different from his earlier story.

You see, he doesn't know yet whether to be on the side of the Philistines (because David went up with them) or on the side of the Israelites (since David is an Israelite). Of course David is in exile, so the young man claims a third more neutral option – that he just happened to be wandering around when he stumbled onto Saul dying. You don't just happen to be on Mount Gilboa when both armies have been lined up for battle since the night before and have been fighting all day long. No. All non-combatants will know to avoid that area. Because there is evidence of at least one lie in this story, some commentators believe the *whole* story is a lie, and he came onto the field *after* the battle was finished and after Saul was dead, and that he was simply bragging. It's possible that he was simply a looter who is taking advantage of the situation. But I tend to agree with those who say that there is enough truth in this story that he must have seen Saul alive and he did indeed finish off Saul, just like Josephus claims. But everyone seems to be in agreement that he is throwing out this line in order to be able feel David out a bit more. Apparently it didn't help much because he has to keep spilling more and more information. Let's read verses 6-10:

**2Samuel 1:6 Then the young man who told him said, “As I happened by chance *to be* on Mount Gilboa, there was Saul, leaning on his spear; and indeed the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him.**

**2Samuel 1:7 Now when he looked behind him, he saw me and called to me. And I answered, “Here I am.”**

**2Samuel 1:8 And he said to me, “Who *are* you?” So I answered him, “I *am* an Amalekite.”**

He doesn't realize it, but this is the first bit of information that has sealed his fate, as far as David is concerned. And because I preached on this two weeks ago, I won't say more now. Verse 9:

**2Samuel 1:9 He said to me again, “Please stand over me and kill me, for anguish has come upon me, but my life still *remains* in me.”**

**2Samuel 1:10 So I stood over him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown that *was* on his head**

**and the bracelet that *was* on his arm, and have brought them here to my lord.”**

Again he is trying to cover his bases, wanting the credit for having killed Saul, in case that gets him credit (because he probably knows that Saul is David’s enemy). But at the same time he insists that Saul invited him to do it, in case killing a king is frowned upon, and adding the touch that he was about to die anyway, and so this was a mercy killing. And maybe he threw that in because he could see disapproving expressions on some people's faces. There is enough truth in what he says here, that I believe the Amalekite did indeed kill Saul. But by bestowing the royal crown and royal bracelets on David, he is pretending to be sacrificial and he is hinting that he wants David to be the next king, and that he is willing to serve him.

**6. He seeks to hitch his wagon to a new star (v. 10b; cf 4:10)**

And by calling David “lord,” and bowing before him, he is seeking to hitch his wagon to a new rising star. There is a lot of shrewd insight that this young Amalekite had, and he must have realized that David would be the next person that he needed to please and whose back he needed to scratch in order to succeed in his rising ambitions. In chapter 4:10, David concludes that the Amalekite wanted riches and position for having brought the news to him.

**7. The young man’s reactions to David’s grieving (vv. 11-12) is another alert that something is fishy (v. 13 with 4:10)**

What probably surprised the Amalekite was that the glorious news that he brought of the death of David’s enemy produced sorrow, not joy. People with selfish ambition tend to project their own attitudes onto others and assume that everyone is driven by selfish ambition. And so David’s reaction was utterly unexpected:

**2Samuel 1:11 Therefore David took hold of his own clothes and tore them, and so *did* all the men who *were* with him.**

**2Samuel 1:12 And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.**

I want you to notice that this is not David’s *claim* to be mourning for all of these people. This was not hypocrisy. This is the inspired narrator telling us of David’s great grief. It says,

**2Samuel 1:12 And they *mourned* and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, *because* they had fallen by the sword.**



**2Samuel 1:13** Then David said to the young man who told him, “Where *are* you from?” And he answered, “I *am* the son of an alien, an Amalekite.”

David wants to make sure that he is not making a mistake, and killing a convert to Judaism (like Uriah the Hittite). But the Amalekite seals his fate by admitting that he is still an Amalekite - one of the people whom David had devoted to death. Verse 14:

**2Samuel 1:14** So David said to him, “How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the LORD’S anointed?”

**2Samuel 1:15** Then David called one of the young men and said, “Go near, and execute him!” And he struck him so that he died.

**2Samuel 1:16** So David said to him, “Your blood *is* on your own head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, ‘I have killed the LORD’S anointed.’ ”

So I think I have given enough to show that the Amalekite is a great example of the selfish ambition that the Bible condemns. Let me quickly show how David illustrates the exact opposite. And the exact opposite of selfish ambition is not lack of ambition. No. No. The opposite of selfish ambition is a driving ambition to fulfill our calling in a way that pleases God. It’s not the ambition that is the problem, but the focus.

## II. The Godly Ambition of David

### A. *Sacrificial - David risked his life to protect others (v. 1a)*

The first characteristic that I want to highlight from David’s ambitious character is that he did not have a dog-eat-dog mentality. He wanted to enter more fully into God’s calling, but he wasn’t going to step on people in order to do it. On the contrary, he was willing to lay down his life for others. The first half of verse 1 alludes to the heroic rescue of their wives and sons from the Amalekites. It was four hundred men diving like hornets into a camp of tens of thousands of Amalekites. You don’t tend to take risks like that if you are driven by selfish ambition. But when you have a God-given ambition, you might.

We saw in 1 Samuel 30 that David’s ambition to be faithful to God enabled him to keep on keeping on despite unbelievable weariness, pain, loneliness, and stress. Someone once said, “No power in the world can keep a first class man down or a fourth class man up.” David was a first class man – a man of great ambition, and nothing could keep him down. And I believe his ambition was so strong (in part) because it was anchored in God, not in creation.

***B. Generous - David sacrificed his finances in order to help others (v. 1b; with 1 Sam. 30)***

The second characteristic of David's ambition was that it was compatible with generosity. And a couple of weeks ago we looked at the incredible generosity of David to those devastated in southern Judah. Contrast that with the Amalekite. He already had a solid gold crown and Saul's gold bracelets. Since he had been stripping the dead, he likely had a lot more than those two items that he had retrieved. He didn't volunteer to hand over the money purses that he had gotten from Saul and his sons. He could have had wealth from the gold that he got, but he was not content with that. His was the kind of ambition that becomes a black hole that eventually consumes you.

He reminds me of a story that is told about Darwin when he was a young boy. He was an avid insect collector, and one day he was eagerly holding a rare beetle in his right fist, and another in his left, when suddenly he caught sight of a third beetle that he simply knew he must have for his growing collection. What to do? In a flash he put one of the beetles in his mouth for safekeeping and reached for the third beetle with his now free hand. But the mouth-imprisoned beetle squirted acid down Darwin's throat, and in the coughing fit that ensued, he lost all three beetles. And that's what happened to this Amalekite.

In contrast, David had learned contentment during the time he spent running from Saul. And in addition to that contentment, he had also learned generosity when he was poor. And so he was able to be generous with the newly acquired riches. For David, money was a tool and not an end in itself. It was a tool to be used as a steward for God, and so his ambitious nature did not make him fall into the trap of avarice.

***C. Sincere - David's mourning was not to impress others, but was heartfelt and God-centered (vv. 11-12,19-27)***

The third characteristic of David's ambition was that it was accompanied with sincerity. If you were an Amalekite who read this chapter, you would likely assume that David was playacting in verses 11-12 just like the Amalekite had been playacting. For many people, life is a game, right? But if he was really playacting, who was he trying to impress or who was he trying to fool? There really wasn't anybody to fool when you think about it. There would be no need to fool the Amalekite because he was shortly going to kill him. He wasn't trying to fool his men since they already knew his heart on this issue. In fact, at the risk of offending his own men he had

already refused to kill king Saul twice and had written of his great sorrow over the rift. There wasn't anyone else to try to fool, so it wasn't playacting. It was a genuine sorrow for great men who had died. Simple logic would tell you that. But we have more evidence. We've already seen that the inspired narrator believed that David genuinely mourned. But the clincher for me is that the tribute to Saul and Jonathan in verses 19-27 (which we will look at in two weeks, Lord willing) is an inspired mourning that is inerrant. It shows a heart that saw things as God saw them. This was no playacting out of selfish ambition. Those verses demonstrate that David was sincere.

***D. Careful - David's zealous ambition was tempered by due diligence – seeking to verify if the young man was a combatant, a convert, or something else (v. 13)***

The fourth thing that I see about David's ambition was that it was careful. Some ambitious people shoot first and apologize later; they have a tendency to run over others like a steamroller. And part of the reason is that they are so focused on their goal that they either don't notice or they don't care that they are hurting others in the process or that they are violating God's law in the process. They are not careful.

But in verse 13 David double checks his information to make sure that he doesn't make a mistake:

**2Samuel 1:13 Then David said to the young man who told him, "Where *are* you from?" And he answered, "I *am* the son of an alien, an Amalekite."**

David had already asked that question earlier. Why is he asking it again? One commentary says that he is making certain. He is exercising due diligence, to make sure that this young man was not a legitimate combatant, or a convert, or something else that didn't warrant the death penalty. But the answer of the Amalekite makes it clear that he deserved death on two counts: 1) He was sentenced to death by God Himself as an Amalekite, and was still identifying with his tribe. 2) Second, by practicing euthanasia (not fighting, but euthanasia), he had engaged in murder, and in this case, murder of God's anointed. So David's ambition was not a reckless ambition; it was a careful ambition.

***E. Godward - David's ambition was tempered with patience and trust in God (v. 14)***

The fifth characteristic that we see about David's ambition is that it was directed Godward. Verse 14 reminds us of David's consistent stance when he had had opportunities to kill Saul earlier.

**2Samuel 1:14** So David said to him, “How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the LORD’S anointed?”

Now, if this was the only time that David had said this, you might be skeptical that he really did care. But we know from 1 Samuel that he *did* care about this principle. David’s men had a different kind of ambition, and they *wanted* to kill Saul. Saul himself was blown away with David’s principled patience and trust in God. Let me read that for you from 1 Samuel 24: Saul told him:

**1Samuel 24:17** ... “You *are* more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil.

**1Samuel 24:18** And you have shown this day how you have dealt well with me; for when the LORD delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me.

**1Samuel 24:19** For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him get away safely? Therefore may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day.

**1Samuel 24:20** And now I know indeed that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand.

He could see the difference between his own ambition and David’s ambition. It is true that David had the ambition to be the king because God had *called* him to be king. But because God had called him to it, he was only willing to enter his office in God’s timing, in God’s way. In fact, in chapter 26 when Abishai got really upset with David for not killing Saul, David said, “**Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD’s anointed and be guiltless?**” This shows a Godward patience; this shows a Godward trust. And unless ambition is God-centered, ambition will get us into trouble.

George W. Truett, a well-known Texas preacher, was invited to dinner in the home of a very wealthy oilman. After the meal, the host led him to a place where they could get a good view of the surrounding area.

Pointing to the oil wells punctuating the landscape, he boasted, "Twenty-five years ago I had nothing. Now, as far as you can see, it’s all mine." Looking in the opposite direction at his sprawling fields of grain, he said, "That’s all mine." Turning east toward huge herds of cattle, he bragged, "They’re all mine." Then pointing to the west and a beautiful forest, he exclaimed, "That too is all mine."

He paused, expecting Dr. Truett to compliment him on his great success.

Truett, however, placing one hand on the man's shoulder and pointing heavenward with the other, simply said, "How much do you have in that direction?"<sup>2</sup>

It's a good question. Brothers and sisters, our ambition must always be Godward. We must patiently wait for God to prosper our efforts. We must trust Him to fulfill our calling enough to do things according to His Word. When God says "Wait," as he said to David, we wait – despite the driving urge of ambition. When God says, "No," we adjust our ambition to please the Lord. But ultimately our ambition must be an ambition to please God.

***F. Consistent - David's execution of the Amalekite was consistent with his previous attitudes toward Saul and his previous zeal for God (vv. 11-16)***

The sixth characteristic of David's ambition was that it was consistent. David's execution of the Amalekite was not expediency. He had not changed in his attitudes toward Saul, and he had not changed his attitudes towards Amalekites. Consistency is a rare virtue indeed. Let me read an article written in the Presbyterian Review in 1866. It said,

The great want of this age is men: Men who are not for sale; Men who will condemn wrong in friend or foe - in themselves as well as others; Men whose consciences are as steady as the needle to the pole; Men who will stand for the right though the heavens totter and the earth reels; Men who can tell the truth and look the world right in the eye; Men who neither brag nor run; Men who neither flag nor flinch; Men who can have courage without shouting it; Men in whom the hope of everlasting life still runs deep and strong; Men who know their message and tell it; Men who know their business and attend to it; Men who are not too lazy to work, nor too proud to be poor; Men who are willing to eat what they have earned and to wear what they have paid for; Men who are not ashamed to say No with emphasis.

In short this journal was saying that this world needs more men like David – men with consistency of character.

***G. Loving - David's ambition was able to build up the "competition" rather than tearing down Saul (vv. 17-27)***

The last thing that characterized David's ambition was that it was loving. Lord willing, I will preach on verses 17-27 in two weeks, but those verses show the heart that David had toward his competitors, Saul and Jonathan. They were the competitors to his throne, right? What is ambition

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<sup>2</sup> Anonymous article as found in Joseph T. Cooper and W.W. Barr (eds), *The Evangelical Repository and United Presbyterian Review, New Series volume V* (Philadelphia: William S. Young, Proprietor, 1866), pp. 323-324. Scanned by Google Books.

tempted to do? It is tempted to wipe out all competition, isn't it? Yet David never felt the need to tear them down. He always blessed them and always valued them. And he continues to do that in this chapter.

Too many times ambition makes people so competitive that they become unloving, ungracious, and unkind. In order to climb the ladder of success, they have to step on, demean, and kick others off the ladder. Those are indicators of humanistic ambition. Godly ambition should never make us step on people's heads to climb the ladder of success, unless of course God has condemned them, as he had the Amalekites. David's ambition was tempered with agape love.

## **Conclusion**

Of all of these characteristics of David's ambition, point E is perhaps the most important. Let me end with a story that I think shows why a Godward ambition helps us to have David's success.

Back during the days when telegraph was the main means of long distance communication, a company put an ad into the newspaper listing a job opportunity for a Morse code operator. A sign on the receptionist's counter instructed job applicants to fill out a form and wait until they were summoned to enter the inner office. So there was a roomful of men waiting. At one point a young man came in, filled out the form and sat down with applicants who had gotten there before him, and after a couple of minutes got up and walked into the inner office. Naturally, the other applicants perked up, wondering what was going on. They had been there a long time and were kind of taken aback at the boldness of this man, because the sign clearly said that they needed to wait until they were summoned to enter the inner office. Well, a few minutes later, the employer emerged with the young man and said, "Gentlemen, thank you very much for coming, but the job has been filled by this young man." Well, everyone was even more taken aback, but one man said, "Wait a minute! I don't understand. He was the last one to come in, and we never got a chance to be interviewed. Yet he got the job. That's not fair." The employer responded, "All the time you've been sitting here, the telegraph has been ticking out the message in Morse code: 'If you understand this message, then come right in. The job is yours.' None of you heard it or understood it. This young man did. So the job is his."

Probably all those men had equal ambition. But the last young man had been paying attention to the morse code. And that is what I would encourage you to do for the rest of your life. Make sure you have great ambition, but make sure that your ear is always tuned toward what God is

calling you to do as defined in the Scripture. That alone will keep your ambition from becoming dangerous. Make sure you can say with Paul, **“Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him”** (2 Cor. 5:9, NASB). And may God prosper you as He prospered David. Amen.

## Humanistic Ambition Versus Godly Ambition 2 Samuel 1:1-16

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 6-17-2012

Introduction – ambition is essential, but can also be dangerous

### I. The Humanistic Ambition of the Amalekite

#### A. Questions that should be answered

1. Why did he switch sides? (v. 1-10)
2. What is motivating his sacrifice and drive? (v. 1-3,13)
3. Why the “bootlicking” gestures? (v. 2,10)
4. Why was he previously in the camp of Israel? (v. 3)
5. Why does he just “happen by chance” to be in the middle of a battlefield? (v. 6)
6. Why had he brought things so valuable to David? (v. 10)
7. David sums it up in 4:10

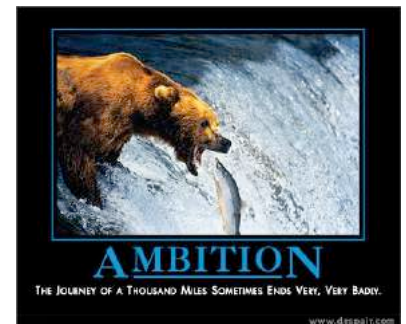
#### B. Further evidence that these questions reveal a humanistic ambition

1. Was clueless about what drove David (v. 1)
2. Was able to make a good show (v. 2)
3. Selfish ambition ambiguously fishes for clues of David’s loyalties (v. 3)
4. More fishing for clues of David’s loyalties (v. 4)
5. Still not certain of David’s loyalties, he ambiguously tells more of the story, but tries to cover his bases (vv. 5-10a)
6. He seeks to hitch his wagon to a new star (v. 10b; cf 4:10)
7. The young man’s reactions to David’s grieving (vv. 11-12) is another alert that something is fishy (v. 13 with 4:10)

### II. The Godly Ambition of David

- A. Sacrificial - David risked his life to protect others (v. 1a)
- B. Generous - David sacrificed his finances in order to help others (v. 1b; with 1 Sam. 30)
- C. Sincere - David’s mourning was not to impress others, but was heartfelt and God-centered (vv. 11-12,19-27)
- D. Careful - David’s zealous ambition was tempered by due diligence – seeking to verify if the young man was a combatant, a convert, or something else (v. 13)
- E. Godward - David’s ambition was tempered with patience and trust in God (v. 14)
- F. Consistent - David’s execution of the Amalekite was consistent with his previous attitudes toward Saul and his previous zeal for God (vv. 11-16)
- G. Loving - David’s ambition was able to build up the “competition” rather than tearing down Saul (vv. 17-27)

Conclusion



 **Upward call**