

Philippians Session 5

3:10-21 – *New Ambition*

Resource: 'A Life worth Living' by Nicky Gumbel, Chapter 7

Timing: 40-50 minutes, then leading into ministry

Buzz groups: Suggestions are boxed, pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

Illustrations: Suggestions are noted, but your own ideas and stories are preferable

Focus: Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group

Icebreaker: Which celebrity would you *detest* being in the *Big Brother* house with?

Introduction

Recap last week on *New Responsibility*

Key Point: Our freedom in Christ leads to a new responsibility to live out the gospel

Key Verse: "*shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life*" (2:15-16)

Introduce this week on *New Ambition*

Key Point: We should eagerly pursue God-given and God-focussed ambitions

Key Verse: "*I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus*" (v.14)

Tell a personal story about a prize perhaps you won in school, or at a sporting event. Or read out some awful Oscar acceptance speeches. Or read out an amusing "Darwin Award" for stupidity.

Share any stories about winning a prize you had to work hard for. Or tell one another about a prize you would love to receive from God when you meet him in heaven.

1. Be Ambitious for Christ's Glory (v.10-16)

The Point: The over-riding ambition of every Christian is to know Christ (v.10)

Paul's ambition is "*to know Christ*" (v.10) – a personal relationship not intellectual facts, through:

→ "*The power of the resurrection*" (v.10; cf Romans 8:11) the person and power of the Holy Spirit

→ "*fellowship in suffering*" (v.10) not as a penalty, but as a privilege. Following Jesus often involves struggle and suffering, but these times bring us closer to him

→ sharing Jesus' new life in heaven (v.11), the completion of everything we hope for

Paul is single-minded about his ambition ("*one thing I do*" v.13)

It's not wrong to have ambitions in every area of life – we should – but they should all be subordinate to our ambition to know Christ

Paul "*strains ahead*" (v.13) and "*presses on to win*" (v.14) just like an athlete

And together, he urges us all to do the same (v.17)

We must also "*forget what is behind*" (v.13), and not dwell on past success or failure

Illustration: Describe or show a picture of an athlete finishing a race – straining right up to the line

Application: Fear of failure holds back so many of us. In our Quiet Time tomorrow let's ask God to show us any past sins or failure we are still living with, which we need to be freed from.

Share how your faith has informed your ambitions for your work, family, or relationships. If it isn't yet fulfilled, what's your plan? If it is, what's next?

2. Deny Our Own Glory (v17-21)

The Point: self-centred ambition is unchristian, unachievable and ends in disaster

Paul shows three hallmarks of self-centred people heading for disaster (v.18-19):

1) they focus on sensuality and personal satisfaction (*"appetite"* v.19)

→ there's nothing wrong with enjoying these things and the body is not evil

→ but when these things become our "god" they displace Jesus

→ much of our culture is focused on satisfying bodily desires

Illustrate: Show and read out some examples of adverts in well-known magazines that make amazing claims for the products and urge us to indulge ourselves

→ lives that revolve around satisfying bodily desires never achieve their aim

Illustrate: Give an example such as Oscar Wilde, or any number of Rock or Film Stars

2) they are self-important (*"their glory is in their shame"* v.19)

→ boasting about possessions, bonuses, sexual conquests or spending sprees

3) sensual ambitions lead to earthly thinking (*"their mind is on earthly things"*)

→ our citizenship is in heaven where we will get new, *"transformed bodies"* (v.21)

→ this certainty motivates us (v.12) to greatness

Illustrate: Briefly tell the story of a Christian who endured much to win much, e.g. Rosa Parkes, Chuck Colson, Eric Liddell. Better still share a story, however small, of a personal experience

Application: We must renew our minds in those areas of our lives where we have been sucked in to earthly thinking, e.g. our spending decisions or the things we choose to read or watch on TV

Conclude

Read out the last paragraph of Chapter 7 in Nicky Gumbel's book 'A Life Worth Living':

"In this passage Paul tells us that everyone is on one of two paths. There are two destinations: one is heading for heaven, the resurrection of the dead and the transformation of our bodies to be like 'his glorious body'. The other is heading for destruction. There are two powers at work: the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit and the power of bodily appetites. There are two possible lifestyles: those willing to share in his sufferings and those who want a lifestyle of ease and comfort. There are two possible gods: our Lord Jesus Christ or our 'stomachs'. There are two possible attitudes to Jesus: either friendship at an intimate level or enemies of the cross. Ultimately there are only two possible ambitions: either his glory, Jesus-centred ambition; or our own glory, self-centred ambition. Paul says, in effect: 'I have changed my ambitions. Now I am Jesus-centred. Will you join me?'"

Ideas for Ministry

- Stand together in silence and ask the Holy Spirit to show us His ambitions for our lives and to help us see the vision He has for us
- Break into pairs to briefly share these things and pray for one another, asking God to show us how to pursue this vision and prepare for it
- Stand together in silence again and ask the Holy Spirit to show us any past fears or failures, selfish ambitions, pride or worldly patterns of thinking that we are struggling to be free from
- Break into pairs to briefly share these things and pray for one another, asking God to break the power of these things and to show us how to walk into the freedom of his forgiveness