

William Shakespeare

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The Dangers of Ambition

Ambition is the sole reason why we live the way we live. The “desire to achieve a particular end” has encouraged people to get things done since the beginning of mankind (“Ambition,” Merriam-Webster). Ambition has its roots in everything man-made. Cities built on the remnants of old civilizations, airplanes, governments, and even the Olympics are just some examples of how ambition has pushed people to and past the impossible. However, all the positive things that have stemmed from ambition often overshadow the potential dangers of such a strong fragment of ourselves. Some synonyms of this word include “lust,” “hunger,” “itch,” and of course “desire” (“Ambition,” Thesaurus). Apart from all being synonyms, these words share something else in common. They are the consequences of allowing ambition to take root in your life. Ambition can cause madness, neglect of those around you, and also lead you to want things that you know are not good for you. Life should not be about ambition, but instead, about the people we spend it with and our attitude we adopt along the way.

Ambition can cause one to only want more and more until they are nothing but a shell of themselves. As Lord Tennyson said, “Ambition is like the sea wave, which the more you drink the more you thirst—yea—drink too much, as men have done on rafts of wreck—it drives you mad” (Quotes of Famous People). It can make peoples' lives horrible because of their endless thirst for what they do not have, such as when a mother desires the complete safety of her children or even when a man falls in love with a woman, knowing she already has a husband. In

the book *The Great Gatsby*, the protagonist Gatsby obsessed over the one thing he didn't have: Daisy. She was his first taste of the upper class, and being with her made him feel like he was too. Throughout his life, rising from the lowest class to the highest, he never forgot how that made him feel. The only problem was the fact that she was already in love with someone else and married to him. Gatsby, in an effort to restore his past with Daisy, tried to do everything in his power to earn her love, but it was too late. In his pursuit of Daisy, Gatsby decided to ignore what he had and ended up paying the price for letting his ambition get to the point of obsession (Fitzgerald).

Similarly, in the show *Game of Thrones*, Cersei Lannister allowed her ambition to blind her. It eventually made her do things no short of genocide. To keep her children safe, she blew up an entire building full of people. Her ambition mixed with her ferocity made her a prominent antagonist throughout the entire series. As she strove for power and her children's well-being, she seemed to ignore the fact that she was still queen of a massive city. Her selfish desires created countless enemies and problems along the way and ended up causing her death. Her ambition for power and the ability to keep her family safe drove her insane. Her desires became obsessions. Had she focused instead on being the best queen and mother she could be, none of the problems that she faced near the end of her life would have been there.

The neglect of those around you and sometimes even yourself can stem from letting ambition get out of control. It can actually cause you to lose sight of what is actually going on around you. Jordan Peterson, a famous Canadian psychologist, used an example where a group of people were told to follow actors dressed in black across a screen. When they did this, the majority of them completely missed a man dressed in a gorilla costume jumping around the same screen ("Jordan Peterson - Your Ambitions Blind You To The Nature Of Reality"). Most of the

people were so set on completing their set task that they failed to acknowledge the true circumstance of the experiment. This social experiment proved that if a person really tries to focus on one thing, everything and everyone besides that one thing becomes unimportant. To avoid this, an ambition for something should be fulfilling. The bible states, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition... Rather, in humility (and) value others above yourself,"(Phil. 2:2-4 New International Version). In valuing others before ourselves, we find lasting purpose. For example, imagine that one of your friend's mothers just passed away. What would you do? You would probably support them in any way you can, not because you expect anything out of it, but because you care about your friend. You get nothing out of supporting your friend, but you don't care because THEY need it. And later when you think back on it, you would probably start to think better about yourself simply because you weren't thinking about yourself for once.

Despite knowing that most things we do don't actually bring us lasting happiness, we still do those things. Why? Ambition, at its root, is a natural and animalistic trait that all living things share to some degree. To have a desire for something is natural. However, ambition takes it one step further: being something that is often all one desires for and part of the "id" category of the human psyche which represents "the human unconscious, amoral desire to be satisfied, whether it is by food, sex, drugs, or power."(Literary Themes Ambition). Success can fall into this category as well. It can be a dangerous thing to be ambitious for. Buzz Aldrin, known for being the second man to walk on the moon, had one soul ambition: get to the moon. He spent his life trying to get there, but when it was over and he was back on Earth, something was different. "Despondent, Aldrin began drinking more, some days not bothering to get out of bed, and put his marriage on shaky ground...". He was depressed because what he thought would bring him happiness only brought him to the realization that he had "no goal, no sense of calling, no project

worth pouring [himself] into,” (Ott). All too often people get caught up in the idea that success will automatically bring them happiness. This could not be further from the truth.

Being happy is part of the journey. Our happiness is determined by our mentality and outlook towards life. It can also be determined by who we choose to spend it with. Wanting things we know we don't need can be detrimental to our futures. Children are growing up with influences that make them believe they can do anything. Social media is a never ending source for seeing the extravagant lifestyles of those who have achieved success. Focus on the word “achieved”. Unfortunately for kids these days, most are not exposed to the videos that show how those particular people got to where they are. The truth is that most failed over and over again to achieve that lifestyle, but kids do not know that. Some see what it is like to live at the very top, but do not see what it takes to get there. This leads to the misconception that “you can achieve anything,” but that simply is not true unless you are willing to give up and sacrifice everything. While it's good to have ambitions, reaching for the stars seldom gets you there. Eminem ends his song “Lose Yourself” by saying “You can do anything you set your mind to, man” (Eminem). This ending is an example of how modern society is conditioning kids into a misguided mindset of “shoot for the stars.” It might seem disheartening, but the fact is that you fall harder the higher up you go. Believe in yourself, but shoot for the sweet spot between unattainable and easily attainable. Doing this will allow you to live your life in the moment, instead of stressing over a goal disguised, in your head, as something that will bring you happiness when you get it.

Ambition is dangerous, but who's to say it is not essential. The curse and blessing, which is ambition, was given by God to all human beings for a purpose. My local priest told me that that purpose is only obtainable through “being ambitious about the right things” and continuously growing through selflessness (Hennigan). Self sacrifice is one of the ultimate forms

of ambition because it requires one to will the best of another before themselves. In some cases, a person changes through an event in their life that ends up causing them to think more selflessly. A common case of this comes in the form of a family. When talking to my vice-principal, he told me about how getting married, having children, and starting a family impacted him. His perspective on life had changed, and with it, his goals. Now that he has people counting on him, selflessness has become a larger part of his life ever since. A family can make someone do incredible things because it shifts their attention away from themselves. In striving to do better for others, we learn to appreciate ourselves. And in striving to live more in the moment, we do not get caught up in wanting things we know aren't good for us. The idea that a "thing" will make you happy is how people fall into insanity. When people get something, and it does NOT give them the happiness they thought they would get, they try to find something else. Then, the cycle repeats.

The true purpose of life comes from finding your own happy medium and riding with that. In the story of Daedalus and Icarus, the tragic outcome of "soaring to high" brings Icarus falling to his demise. While trapped on top of an inescapable tower, Icarus and his father start to build wings fashioned from feathers and wax. Finally, after they finished, Daedalus told Icarus that if he jumps and flies too low, then the water will splash on his wings and he will drown in the ocean. Icarus was also told that if he flies too high, then the sun will melt the wax and cause him to fall to his death. Understanding that, Icarus decides to jump. He flew, but not after long, he wanted to fly higher. One moment, he was flying higher than anyone else in the world, then the next he was plummeting into the ocean because he was too ambitious for his own good. The same lesson can be applied to anything you do in life. If you are going to do something, know when to do more and know when to do less. Either extreme can be dangerous to your well being.

Your ambitions are the products of your principles. While they can be dangerous if you allow them to be, they are also necessary to do any true good. Life is about being ambitious. Where would we be without drive and desire? Our mission is to be ambitious about the right things. Being ambitious about the wrong things can lead you down a path no one wants to go down. It is vital to keep in mind those close to you and always remember your attitude matters more than the circumstance you are put in. If we can incorporate selflessness into our ambitions and find the sweet spot between possible and impossible, we will truly be able to live our lives to the fullest.

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