
ONE HOLY AMBITION: *The Cure for Spiritual ADHD*

Romans 15:14-33

I want to share with you an article I read a few days ago. It is titled:
The Amazing Story of a Boy Who Would Never Focus on Anything
By Natalie Staats Reiss, Ph.D. Aug 25th 2008

“As a swimmer, I was thrilled to watch Olympic history in the making as Michael Phelps broke world records and won 8 gold medals. As a psychologist, I was particularly interested to hear Michael's mother describe some of the challenges he had to cope with along the way to his amazing feats.

Not only was Phelps a child who dealt with his parent's divorce and being raised by an absentee dad and a single mother, he also struggled with ADHD. According to his mother and his coach, Michael was a very disruptive boy who never sat still and never stopped talking as he bounced from one thing to another. His symptoms were so severe that when he was in elementary school, a teacher told his mother that Phelps would never focus on anything.

Rather than giving up, Michael, with the strong support and guidance of his mother, sisters, and coach, focused on swimming. He took Ritalin until sixth grade, at which point, his busy schedule of swim practices, swim meets, and his mother's parenting skills kept him focused.

Interestingly, his coach now says that his best attribute is single-mindedness. This trait allows Phelps to focus on his goals. For the past 10 years, he's never missed one day of his seven days of practice a week schedule, swimming nearly 50 miles a week.

Certainly, all children with ADHD won't become Olympic level athletes.

However, Michael Phelps and his family should provide inspiration to both parents and children who are coping with this disorder. Finding and channeling a passion, goal setting, determination, practice, and perseverance are all keys to success in life, especially if you are dealing with a mental illness. It is truly an amazing story on many different levels.”

I think we have much in common with Michael Phelps before his transformation into an Olympic champion...as a boy he had an incredible difficulty focusing (ADHD) on the things that were important (like school). We are similar in that we have an incredible difficulty focusing on the one thing that is most important—living for Jesus Christ. We have spiritual ADHD. Our hearts are drawn to sleep and sex, to food and television, to personal projects and careers, and to money and status, and sometimes...sometimes...even to Jesus. Our hearts flit from one

interest to another with little passion because we do not have ONE HOLY AMBITION.

Do you ever read the letters of Paul and wonder why you are not more like that?

Perhaps you give excuses like, “Paul was an Apostle. He talked with Jesus! There are very few Pauls. The rest of us live busy ‘grind it out’ daily lives with work and kids and bills to pay. It is not the same.”

Or “Paul was intense and that just isn’t my personality. I’m more laid back.”

When you read the book of Acts and you see those people selling all of their stuff, meeting each others needs, and preaching the gospel boldly, perhaps you make excuses like:

“That was a special time when the Spirit was poured out. Things are different today.”

Or “That was a different culture and a different time when people didn’t have such concrete ideas of private property.”

Or, my personal favorite, “They were free to honor God by giving up their stuff and boldly proclaiming the Gospel. I want to honor him by keeping my stuff and by letting people come to me to talk about the Gospel. Different strokes for different folks.”

I understand these excuses completely because I have made them all and many more. But our text today tells us something very different. For those of us who are not like Paul, who had a single minded holy ambition, a mission, that drove everything he did with white hot passion, we have what I would like to call Spiritual ADHD.

Turn to our text today, Romans 15:14-33, which illustrates Paul's ONE HOLY AMBITION. Let's read God's Word.

Paul writes:

14 "I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. 15 But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. 17 In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. 18 For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, 19 by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; 20 and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, 21 but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."

22 This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. 23 But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, 24 I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. 25 At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. 27 For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. 28 When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you. 29 I know that when I come to you I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

30 I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, 31 that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. 33 May the God of peace be with you all. Amen."

My Thought Process

The question I was asking myself as I was working through the text was, how do these passages (v. 8-13- unity conclusion, v. 14-21- Paul's mission, v. 22-29- financial plea and travel plans, v. 30-33, prayer) fit together at all? Well, as I was reading through the passage I noticed something strange in verses 15 and 16 that caused me to ask a question...Let me read the verses:

“15 But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God 16 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God.”

So here is the question that I asked: What does Paul's bold manner in which he wrote the church in Rome have to do with his calling to minister to the Gentiles in places where Christ has NOT already been named (v.20)? So as I hunted for an answer to this question I came across three clues that led me to an answer.

1. First, Paul writes in verse 20 that he makes it his “ambition” to do this pioneering church planting work. It struck me that this was such a strong word to describe what he is doing. These are not just his plans or what he is supposed to do. By using this word he is telling us that this something he longs to do and strives with all of his might to accomplish!
2. Second, I noticed in verse 22-29 that as Paul explains why he has not been able to visit the Christians in Rome and his plans to visit them in the future, that his mission takes **PRIORITY OVER EVERYTHING**. Look at verses 22-24a: “22 This (Paul's mission) is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. 23 But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, 24 I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain.”
3. Third, I saw that in verse 24 Paul was making a financial plea for support. “I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be **helped on my journey there by you**, once I have enjoyed your company for a while.” It is shocking, but it seems Paul wrote the whole book of Romans to ask for financial support for his mission!

These clues led me to this conclusion: Paul's **ONE HOLY** (not self-centered) **AMBITION** to preach the Gospel to the unreached Gentiles for the glory of God, is what drives Paul **IN EVERYTHING** that he does. Paul wrote the book

of Romans as a plea for material and spiritual support for his mission and this led Paul to speak **BOLDLY** about the foundations of the faith and even to risk offending the Christians in Rome. Why? **ANSWER:** If the Roman Christians did not have a clear grasp on the gospel and how to live in unity, they would never be able to really support his mission. His mission drove him to risk them no longer liking him.

His **ONE HOLY AMBITION** even drives what he asks them to pray about! Look at the request for prayer in verses 30-33

“I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, 31 that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. 33 May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.”

He asks them to pray that he won't get killed **ON THE MISSION** and that he would be able to come back to Rome to spend to with them to be refreshed **FOR THE MISSION**.

Summary

So- Paul is so singularly focused that the result is that his **ONE HOLY AMBITION** drives **EVERYTHING** he does.

The problem with this is that in 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul tells us to “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” But we are not driven by **ONE HOLY AMBITION**> We are spiritually distracted and spiritually fearful people. We flit about dipping our toes into ministry but never really jumping in. We speak about Jesus, but not too much. We dabble with this and we dabble with that. We, for the most part, are not **DRIVEN** by **ONE HOLY AMBITION**. We are like Michael Phelps before he went into swimming. Unfocused spiritual children in need of a cure.

How do we change from being distracted and fearful people with Spiritual ADHD, to focused and driven Christians with ONE HOLY AMBITION? How can we be more like Paul? More like the early church in the book of Acts?

We describe the way someone behaves who has ONE HOLY AMBITION as BOLD. In verse 15 Paul said that he wrote to the Roman Christians with boldness. So, we want to know how we can become BOLD like Paul.

First, What is biblical boldness?

Let's avoid misunderstanding. We are not talking about personality here. Biblical boldness is not simply being outgoing or gregarious. And biblical boldness is not aggressiveness or pushiness that comes from the flesh. True God given boldness is humble and yet certain about the things of Christ; it is gentle and yet willing to confront over kingdom issues.

Consider this example of boldness in the book of Acts:

“On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, 6 with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, 9 if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. 11 This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:5-13).

How do we become biblically bold? (Boldness is the action of living out our ONE HOLY AMBITION)

Here is a pathway to God glorifying boldness.¹ I have five points or steps.

1. Repent

If you are not bold, but rather you are fearful and distracted, begin by confessing your sin. Don't make excuses about your personality... You and I fear people, we covet their opinions of us- we don't want to look like fools or crazy people- and as a result we are ashamed of Jesus Christ. So far I have called it Spiritual ADHD. But it is really idolatry of the opinions of men and love of the world. Repent of your sin, beg God to forgive you by the power of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Weep mourn and wail over your sin.

2. Meditate on the truth concerning your new identity in Christ

- Legally, you have been adopted into the family of God John 1:12
- Morally, you have received the nature of the Son of God through the new birth. John 1:13, Ephesians 4:24
- You are a living son of God who is a soldier invited to fight in God's battle program of worldwide redemptive conquest. Matthew 28:16-20
- God promises, because of Christ's death in your place, to be with you and to fight for you! Romans 8:32, Matthew 28:18-20

3. Humble yourself.

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Notice how Paul speaks of his accomplishments in ministry as Christ's accomplishments in Romans 15:17-19 "In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. **18** For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, **19** by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ."

Paul won't speak of his own ministry exploits. He refuses to speak as though he has done anything great. He is determined to speak as Christ's instrument or tool. Christ is the one who did the work. Paul does not take the glory...Christ gets it all. Change the way you speak about things and actively speak about what Jesus is doing in your life rather than what you are doing for him. Speak about how He is

¹ Much of this material on boldness I took from C. John Millers great book *Powerful Evangelism for the Powerless*.

changing you rather than how you are working hard to change. Change the way you speak and humble yourself to give Christ glory.

4. Do something that demands boldness.

Consider what Paul has set out to do- to preach Christ where he has not been named. That is beyond His abilities and it will take a supernatural work of God. Perhaps some of you desire to do that and perhaps it scares some of you. Let me put before you just some of the need for such pioneer missionaries.

I have been in contact with Frontier Missions Agency who do work with Muslims. They gave me some information on unreached people groups that I want to share with you.

***Power Point of Pakistan

Imagine, millions of people who have never heard about Jesus and no one is there to tell them. Does that start a fire in your belly? Someone has to go! Step out in faith- Go to Pakistan to share the Gospel! Or share the Gospel with your neighbor! Or both!! OPEN YOUR MOUTH for the kingdom and BUSY YOUR HANDS for the kingdom.

Speak to unbelievers about Christ- friends or total strangers. They are going to hell without knowing about Him. Do you believe that? Do you really believe that? They are robbing your God of glory every moment of everyday that they do not bend the knee to Christ. Does that bother you?

Speak to believers about Christ. ask if you can pray to Jesus for them right then and there. Many times it seems believers do not want to talk about Jesus! Maybe they are frightened or distracted- I don't know. But give God glory and talk about your love for Christ and about all that He is doing in your life. The key is to do something for Christ that you are passionate about that calls you to trust in God for power to accomplish because you cannot do on your own. Step out in faith to do and say something that is IMPORTANT.

Lynne's headache story

- Do you remember our my friends Lynne and Mike Paasch.
- Lynne struggled for years with severe migranes but was actually healed by Christ through laying on of hands and prayer over her.
- Doctor asks about it and she is tempted to point to natural causes and not give glory to Christ...but she overcomes the fear...She opened her mouth for Christ.

5. Pray fervently for boldness for your mission and enlist others to pray for you and with you for it. Paul did! In Ephesians 6:19-20 he enlists prayer so that “words may be given me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”

If you struggle with fear and timidity or arrogant aggressiveness when speaking to others, PRAY. Fervently pray. Enlist others to pray that God would make you biblically bold.

Conclusion

Michael Phelps was a distracted young boy who could not concentrate. But once Michael Phelps was introduced to swimming, he had ONE AMBITION; to win BIG in the Olympics someday. He ate, drank, and slept swimming for years. Everything else in his life was defined by his ONE AMBITION. Paul was the same way, except his ONE AMBITION was HOLY. He was focused, body and soul, on glorifying Christ- specifically by preaching Christ to the unreached Gentiles. It made Paul holy, bold, and prayerful. What about you? Is Christ to you what the Olympic medals and fame was to Michael Phelps?

Do you have a ONE HOLY AMBITION?

Or are you stuck in UNHOLY AMBITIONS- comfort, being praised and accepted by people, career, etc...?

It is not too late...

- Repent of your fear, your lack of trust in Christ, and your love for other things.
- Believe that Christ’s blood is so powerful that it can actually cleanse you of your sin.
- Pick something great to do for Jesus that you must open your mouth and move your hands and feet boldly.
- Believe that the Holy Spirit of God can empower you to speak and live boldly. Pray...Cry out to God boldly...believing that God wants you to come to Him boldly as a perfectly loved son of God because of Christ!

Finally, say with Paul, boldly

“It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage, now as always, Christ will be honored in my body whether by life or by death. For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

Let’s pray...