



The Cup

by Francis Frangipane

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When I first came to Christ, the Lord gave me a dream about my future. I thought that everything the Lord said was supposed to occur immediately; I didn't know of the work of preparation and dying to self, of learning patience and maintaining vision through testing that would occur before God's promise would find fulfillment. Consequently, I was filled with ambition. Ambition is the first motive that arises in the spiritually immature. I was like the disciples who, a few days after Jesus' resurrection, were already asking, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom" (Acts 1:6)?

Ambition is very deceptive. It can seem just like obedience, yet because we don't truly know the Lord, the voice we find ourselves obeying is not God's, but our own. Our vision can actually be from God, but our motive be self. Consequently, where there is ambition, James tells us there will soon emerge "disorder and every evil thing" (James 3:16). Why? Because we begin thinking we can accomplish the will of God through the strength of man. We are seeking a breakthrough; God wants to give us brokenness.

The spiritually immature do not recognize their immaturity because they are immature. Thus, they become impatient, fearful and demanding. Because pride blinds the ambitious, we presume we are ready for greater assignments in God. In fact, we become a harder assignment for those who work with us, for our actions continually generate strife.

Ambition seeks to put to death what stands between it and spiritual fulfillment. Yet, it is ambition itself which must die to reach fulfillment. Webster's tells us that ambition is "an earnest desire for some type of achievement or distinction, as wealth or fame, and the willingness to strive for it." The word translated "ambition" in the NAS is rendered "strife" in the King James. Truly, ambition is a major cause for strife, church splits and conflicts within the church.

I thought having a promise from God was the same thing as receiving a command from God. I did not understand what I personally lacked in character nor what I needed to attain concerning faithfulness and thankfulness. These things needed to be worked in me before God would fulfill His promises, miracles and opportunities. What I became for God was more important than what I did for Him.

Today, I am living in the spiritual substance of what was just a dream thirty years ago. My ambitions have suffered greatly, yet my dreams are being fulfilled. While I have not yet arrived at the greatest aspects of my calling, I understand the difference between ambition and true leadership and it is this: Ministry is not a call to lead, but to die.

Every advance that I have made spiritually was preceded by an opportunity to die to self. The power in my life comes from where I have died to self and now live unto Christ.

Do you want to advance spiritually? God will arrange opportunities for you to die to self. You must discern them. Dying to self and its ambition is the means of reaching true spiritual fulfillment. If you react to the opportunity to die with anger or resentment, you will fail to reach fulfillment. However, if you can maintain your vision even while your ambition dies, you will succeed. Death precedes life. Truly, we must die to go to heaven.

We Each Carry Something

A godly vision is not the same thing as a godly motive. Jesus preached that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. This is vision. But He also taught this: If any man would follow Me, let him "take up his cross." If we would follow Him we must pick up our cross. Notice He said we each had a special cross: let him pick up his cross. God has a cross made just for you; it is tailored exactly your size.

En route to your spiritual fulfillment there will inevitably be many opportunities to stumble. I have heard that out of every forty seminary graduates only one retires as a pastor. Few are those who truly carry the cross throughout their lives. But hear me well: If you do not carry your cross, you will undoubtedly carry an offense. Are you carrying offenses now? You will know if you are if, when you look to the past, instead of remembering how God delivered you, you primarily remember how people hurt you.

You see, our definition of success must be transformed. Ambition defines achievement as "A well known name and praise from man." God, however, says success is becoming Christlike. Thus, the Father indeed will allow offenses to come where you will either forgive and become Christlike or become trapped in an offense, a wound or injustice. You ask, "Why would God do that?" Because the goal is not to start churches, take cities or have revivals; the goal is to become Christlike. Christ requires that you forgive offenses and that you use offenses as an opportunity to grow in love.

"Why doesn't the Lord protect me from hardship?" you ask. He does. Your protection is to carry your cross. The cross represents the perfection of love in your life. If you don't carry the cross, you will experience a progressive loss of love, just as Jesus warned, "because iniquity abounds, the love of many grows cold."

The Signs of a True Ministry

On occasion, ministers will approach me and confess they are jealous of how the Lord has used me. They see the outward signs of ministry: churches uniting, large conferences, travel, and book sales. They do not see the cost. I have faced death threats from satanists and persecutions from Christians. For instance, often I see satanic graffiti and vandalism on hosting churches' street signs. I also face the persecution of Christians who have feared the idea of unity. As a result, I've found my name slandered in books and periodicals, even named by misguided Christians as the "antichrist" or a "false prophet."

Once, a host pastor was murdered just before I was to come speak for a conference. So, I brought along our co-pastors Bill and Tim from River of Life. Tim shared with me recently that the first night there he had to search his heart, "Would he step between me and an assailant, would he take a knife for me if I were attacked?"

I appreciated that his answer was "Yes." But in a hundred other conferences, where there has been no one to stand between me and a crazed assailant, I've had to prayerfully consider, "Am I willing to die for the Lord by going to this conference armed only with the gospel?" Additionally, I

possessed deep concerns about my children and their safety when I was gone: How do I deal with their vulnerability to potential physical attack?

Any volunteers for my assignment? Like Paul, I've had to say, "I die daily." I have had to die to fears caused by threats and the possibilities of terrible evil, things that most people never think of, not in their worst nightmares. As I said, I have learned that a call to leadership is a call to die. To the degree that we die to self, we lead others. Everything else is just religion without power.

In Matthew 20:17-19 Jesus sought to prepare His disciples for the hardships that awaited them. He warned that a time was coming when He would be mocked, scourged and crucified for the sake of redemption! In the midst of this utterly sober warning, incredibly, the mother of James and John requested of Jesus fulfillment of her family's ambitions! She said, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left" (vs 21).

She's thinking advancement, position and place; Jesus is thinking scourging, mocking and death. She's looking for the crown; Christ spoke of the cross. Jesus' answer speaks not only to silence her ambitions, He speaks to ours as well:

"You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?"

They said to Him, "We are able" (vs 22). In truth, they hadn't the foggiest idea of the price that was to be paid. It was only pride, ignorance and ambition talking. Yet, listen to how Jesus answered them (verse 23): "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father." Hear this you who desire to lead. Jesus was telling them: I cannot fulfill your ambitions. I can only show you how to die.

"My cup you shall drink," He told them. Yes. And we too shall drink His cup. He described the elements of that cup as He continued, again slaying the dragon of ambition, "...whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give Himself as a ransom for many" (verses 27 & 28). If you will advance with Christ, you will drink His cup. What's in the cup? Suffering for the sake of love. Giving yourself "a ransom" for the sake of redemption. This is the cup that leads to destiny: suffering for others.

"But you don't understand Francis, I've been hurt." Excuse me, but I rebuke the spirit of self pity that is tormenting you and I command it to leave. Now, follower of Jesus, grow up! Forgive the offense and let it go. Moreover, not only forgive it, become an intercessor for the one who hurt you. Become one who lays down his life for those who wounded you. This is not a deep truth; it is the basic path of Christ!

Paul wrote of the source of power in his life. He said, "that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted...but not crushed... always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus that the life of Jesus might be manifested through our mortal flesh" (2 Corinthians 4:7-10). What is this "dying of Jesus"? It is dying the way Jesus died, uttering "Father, forgive them ." The only way ambition can be fulfilled is if we are ambitious to die for the redemption of others.

"For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you" (2 Cor 4:11-12). This is the heart of leadership, or true Christian maturity: we are delivered over to death that the very life of Jesus, the actual substance of His character, may be manifested in our mortal flesh. Ambition will fail us, but Paul says, "So death works in us." Death works. Death

of self leads to the manifest life of Jesus. This is success; here abides true spiritual fulfillment. Leadership is just a call to die. Spiritual maturity is to drink deeply of the cup of Christ.

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