

Spiritual Maturity Part 3: Selfish Ambition & Vain Conceit

Discussion Guide – September 28, 2025

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves...” Phil. 2:1-3

Quotes

“Selfish ambition turns every interaction into a competition. If life is a zero-sum game, I can’t afford to feel your struggle — because your gain feels like my loss.”

“Vain conceit is like writing checks your ego can’t cash. It’s puffing yourself up with an image you can’t sustain — appearances over depth, image over reality.”

Selfish ambition whispers: “Don’t waste energy on them, focus on you.” Vain conceit whispers: “Don’t let them get too close — they might mess up your image. You need to protect that otherwise people will think LESS of you” Both are the antithesis of empathy. Both are clear markers of immaturity.

“When selfish ambition or vain conceit get a foothold in us, we stop listening. Conversations turn into debates and eye rolls. Dialogue becomes talking past one another. And empathy? Good luck, right?”

“The immature life is bent inward — either striving (selfish ambition) or performing (vain conceit). But the mature life, patterned after Jesus, bends outward — self-emptying, self-giving, willing to see and feel with others.”

Discussion Questions

1. How did last week’s empathy challenge (pausing to imagine yourself in someone else’s shoes, and then feeling their story) go for you? What did you find difficult, and what did you learn from trying it?
2. Paul warns against “selfish ambition.” In what ways do you see this spirit of competition — needing to win, get ahead, or protect your tribe — show up in everyday life (workplace, school, politics, even in the church)? How does it block us from really listening to or empathizing with others?
3. Paul also names “vain conceit” — empty glory, image without substance. Where do you notice this in our culture today (social media, consumerism, religious performance)? How might you see traces of it in your own life?
4. In the *Enemies Project*, empathy came alive when people stopped trying to win an argument and instead tried to understand each other’s fears and hopes. Can you think of a time when someone really *listened* to you — not to debate, but to understand? How did that affect you?
5. Paul says the mature life looks like Jesus: bending outward, valuing others above ourselves, even when it costs something. What is one step you could take this week to practice that kind of maturity — to move from protecting your image or viewpoint toward truly seeing and hearing another person?