

Excellence and How to Get There

I am glad you are here today. This is such a collaborative effort when we make these video lessons.

I wish you could meet the cameraman that works on this show. He makes my day. He just makes me laugh. He is always pulling tricks on me or doing something and catching me off guard right before I start the show. He gets me laughing. Today, we want to talk about excellence. Do you have excellence in your life? You may say, "I have messed up my life so much. Excellent? My life stinks. I am kind of a perfectionist and I never feel like I hit the mark. I never get it perfect."

Somebody else says, "How do you do it? What do you mean excellence? I have never had anybody train me. If you knew my life, nobody trained me in any of that. Can you be trained? Is it too late to live a life of excellence?" No, it is never too late. It is never too late to correct a mistake, ever.

You can have excellence in all things. It can be little. It can be big. One day my daughter came in and said, "Mother, why don't we have any pictures on the walls in our halls of all of us as a family?"

When you go in other people's homes and they do." I said, "I don't know. I just never had really wanted any down the hall like that." She said, "Well, I think we ought to have them." Do you know what I did? As soon as she left the house I got all of the pictures out. I laid them out on the floor. I arranged them just like I thought they ought to look. When she came back, they were hanging. She said, "Why did you do that?" I said, "It is never too late to correct a mistake and I am glad I did it."

You know, I enjoyed those pictures. I would walk down that hall and there were my kids when they were little, when they were growing up, when they were in junior high and high school. I was glad I did it. It was a blessing. There is always a way to fine tune your life and make it even better, even more productive.

Am I talking about perfectionism? Absolutely not. There is no one perfect in this world except Jesus. You are not and you cannot ever be. What is the difference between excellence and perfectionism?

Is there a difference? Oh, there is a big difference. The difference is the fruit of them. One time I was asking the Lord about all of this and He spoke to my heart. I believe it would be a word of knowledge, a word of wisdom that is talked about in Corinthians because there is no way I could have thought of it. It happened so fast in my head. I grabbed a pencil and wrote it down really fast because I did not want to forget it. I knew it was the Lord teaching. This is what I heard Him say when I was saying what is the difference between perfectionism and excellence. This is what I heard. "Perfectionism focuses on you. Excellence focuses on God." Is that not true? Think about if you are a perfectionist, is it not because you want it to make you look good, to make you seem like you have got it all together. It is really about you. Excellence is about doing a job very well. Now, do I want a surgeon that is not a perfectionist? Nope, there is nothing wrong with making things the best they can be and not standing for error, especially in some fields like that. But, is it driving you, does it torment you when you are never pleased with your job. No matter how good it is, you think yes, but I could have done this a little bit better. Then it drives you and it is not from God. I watch these shows every week. Sometimes I watch them with the sound off, sometimes I watch them with the sound on, but I watch them to see how to improve myself. Do I see what places I need to improve? I do. Do I try to make changes? Absolutely. Do I ask people for advice? How do you think it is going? What do you see that I could do to make it better? In a way that sounds like I am trying to be a perfectionist. It is just that I know there is no way I can get it perfect.

Have you ever heard of Gabriel Byrne? He is an actor on the Broadway stage in New York. He had been in this play every night, night after night, matinee, everything for months. He is probably one of the finest actors around. Someone came to him and said, "You know people are paying \$85 a ticket to see you." This was probably some time back because I think they are more than that now for sure.

"People are paying a lot of money to see you act. Do you ever make a mistake?" He said, "I make a mistake every night." What does that tell you? 1) He goes over his performance in his mind. 2) He critically evaluates himself. 3) He understands he is not going to be able to do it perfectly and he has to be able to live with that. A perfectionist cannot live with it. It is just driving them all of the time, nagging at them.

Excellence is a different thing. Excellence is when you do your very best. I have been doing this show for about a year now. If I looked back at my first show I think I would go, "Oh, bless her heart."

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You know, my heart was in it. I wanted so much to communicate the Word of God to people. I wanted so much to teach how to walk with God to people. There were people who watched those shows that said it really helped them. They learned things. Does that mean that I am not trying hard now to make it an even better show? No, I want it the best it can be. I am serving God. I am representing God. I am the ambassador of God so I want it to be good. You are like that too. You want it to be good. You want, whatever you do, you want it to reflect God.

Is there something in the Bible about that? Yes, there are all kinds really. Here is one from the Sermon on the Mount. Here is Jesus teaching about salt and light. Listen to what He says about salt and listen to what He says about light because He is saying that you and I are salt and we are light. "You are the salt of the earth, (We know that expression; that means they are just an average, good-hearted person, just a good person) but what good is salt if it has lost its flavor. (Have you lost your flavor? Can you make it useful again?) It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless. (Salt that has lost its flavor is not any good to anybody but can Jesus take you and make you flavorful again? Yes. Over and over and over until you draw your last breath. You never ever have to worry about losing your flavor, and that is it, I am old and it is over. Never.) You are the light of the world, like a city on a mountain. (Have you ever been traveling in a mountainous area and the mountains are high and it is dark. It is late at night. There are stars out but you cannot really see any cities and then all of a sudden you look up and at the top of a mountain area is a big city. You look over here and you look over there and you see all of those twinkling lights and you are drawn to it. Your eyes are fascinated looking at it. You find yourself thinking I wonder what is going on in all of those lights. I wonder what is happening in there. That is how God wants you and I to be, like a city on a mountain where people look at it and wonder, what is that? Who is that? What is that person like?) Glowing in the night for all to see.

Everybody, Christian and non-Christian ought to be able to look at your life, see such an excellence in it that they are amazed and want to be like you. Does that mean you have to be the president of your company or the president of the United States or a movie star? No. If your job is what you consider the lowest man on the totem pole and you do it with excellence, it is great. It is all great.

God does not judge like the world judges. He looks at you and says how did you do with the job I gave you to do. You say, "Lord, I did it the best I could do it. I made some mistakes but I did it the best I could do it." He says, "Well done good and faithful servant." That is what we all want to hear.

Here is another thing where God is kind of like talking about candle light, so we are not talking about that big city now, all of those lights, we are talking about one light. It says, "Do not hide your light under a basket, instead, put it in a stand and let it shine for all. In the same way, let your good deeds shine for all to see so that every one will praise your Heavenly Father." When you are in the public like I am and travel a lot and speak a lot people will give you a lot of compliments. I have seen people that say, "Oh no, I am not anything. I am not anything. No," thinking that that is humility. It is not. When people want to say thank you, you have done a great job, enjoy it. You worked hard did you not? You did the work. Just say thank you, that really makes me feel good. It sure makes me feel good when people say things like that. When I get alone I get by myself and I take all of those compliments and I say, "Up to you God, up to you God, all of it goes up to you. You heard my prayers. You answered my prayers. Up to you God. It is all about you." That keeps you from getting a big ego. Your light shines and everybody can see it. I think you can see the Lord in people's faces. I have seen it before. You look at them and they are just full of God. You can see it.

There is an excellence that can come in any area of your life. Does God love excellence? We can go back to bugs and trees and fish and flowers and birds. I do not see any mistakes in them. They are just incredible. God is a genius is he not? Think about music. Think about Beethoven or Bach.

Think about beautiful music and the intricacies of it. Excellence. Think about Michelangelo and his art. Excellence. We all love excellence and we need to demand it of ourselves. You say that just puts too big a burden on me. No, you do it by God's Spirit, by God's power and His grace. It is not hard. Jesus said, "My burden is easy, my yoke is light." If you are going around thinking you are doing something for Jesus and your burden is heavy, your yoke is heavy, there is something wrong.

You are somehow doing it in your own strength, because Jesus who had the biggest job of anybody in the world ever, He had to bear the sins of the world and come and tell people I am from God and I am your answer. There is not a bigger job than that and He only had three years to do it in. He knew that. He had to wait thirty years to even get started and then He only had three years. Then He picks these twelve guys to help Him; one of them is a traitor, one of them denies Him. He has all of these people He is trying to get the message to and He said, "Take my yoke upon you. My burden is easy and my yoke is light." How in the world could He say that? Because in His path to excellence He made sure every day He was alone with God, in God's presence soaking in His presence, taking in the breath of God into His own life and heart and then going out in that. You can do that.

Anybody can do that.

Think about the parable of the talents in Matthew 14. One guy said I knew what you were like. I know about God. I heard about God. You are a mean taskmaster and I knew you would get mad so I buried my talent. Another guy said, "You know I did not have that many talents but the ones I had at least I doubled them." It went on up to the guy with five talents and he multiplied his five times.

You might say, "I do not have very many talents, Betty." Well, if you are only good in art and you are an artist that is a pretty good talent. You do not have to be a five talent person to be okay with God and measure up to God. He does not measure like that. The way He measures is, what did you do with what I gave you to do? How did you do it? This guy that is so afraid of God and thinks God is mean and is a taskmaster; that is when God got angry. He said, "That is great. He was so disgusted with that person." You do not want to bury your talents. Figure out what it is and do it. Just remember, the people in the Bible, whether they were Daniel, Joseph, Abraham or Moses, they were ordinary average people doing an extraordinary job. The job was extraordinary that they were called to but they did not do it by their power, they did it by His Spirit.

You know the verse in Zechariah; I think it is in chapter 4. "Not by might, not by power but by My Spirit, says the Lord." Make sure you are doing things by God's Spirit, not by your own ingenuity, your own wits. Of course you use your brain, of course you use what you have got to work with but learn how to do it by God's Spirit. It has so much greater affect on life. It has a permanent affect on your life. When you die you can say I did what I was put here to do.

Another thing I see nowadays, there is so much talk on destiny. What is your destiny? What is your calling? There is a reason for that because there is a great war going on and God needs everybody doing their job, doing their part, everybody. Some of you are old enough that you remember World War II. There were people working in factories who were doing a job that made a difference in another country. They could have said, "Well I am not General Patton." They did not say it that way. They said, "No, I did my part." You want to be like that.

You need to get inspired by God. You need to get filled with His Holy Spirit. You need to learn how to walk daily in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus did it. He had to learn too. You know He came as a man. He had to learn what we learned. It does not matter if it is a big job or a small job, all that matters is were you found faithful? Did you do it to the best of your ability? There is a price to pay for excellence. Say you go to a concert and you hear them play the piano and they are incredible and you say, "Oh, I would love to be like you. Oh, how wonderful." They say, "Well, it was not that hard." That is not true. They practiced hours and hours and hours a day when nobody was around, when they wanted to be doing something else and they paid the price. There is a price for excellence. You do have to pay it to get it but it is worth it.

Everything you do, do it for the glory of God. That is what it says in I Corinthians. "Do everything for the glory of God." You know God wants the glory. Does that mean God is some kind of a glory hog?

No, it is not about that. It is about what it produces in people's lives. It produces something that is changing, life-changing, transforming; there is a power in it. That is why He is saying to do it. You have to learn how to love God with a pure heart, not for what He can do for you but just because you love Him. You have to learn how to serve Him with a pure heart, not "okay, if I do this now you have to do something for me, okay?" It is not like that, but a deep desire to do it right. If God loves excellence and it is the complete opposite of mediocrity, then what else does God hate? He hates slothfulness. You say, "Well, I am kind of lazy." Well, get with the program because God hates that.

I did not say God hates you, God hates slothfulness. He hates that performance of slothfulness. I am going to tell you something and I want you to really listen to me. You are smarter than you think you are. Did you hear me? You are smarter than you think you are. You have more talents than you think you do. I do not care what you have done to discover your talents, there are still new things you can learn how to do and be very good at it and help a lot of people. It does not have anything to do with your age.

I just love to see those newspaper articles about some really old man or old woman and they are still running marathons and they are like in their 90s. They are running races constantly. It fascinates me. It is like, boy they must have the heart of a champion. How in the world could you be that old and still be that motivated to be out there? Actually I hope I am that old and still preaching the gospel. One time I told my kids, I said, "Face it, I am going to have dyed black hair and I am going to wear tennis shoes and I am going to be jetting around the world preaching the gospel." They go, "Mom." You know how kids roll their eyes. I said, "You better just get with it. I am dying my hair until I die. I am going to have black hair until I die, so just get used to it." I hope I am 92 and I am out preaching somewhere and God calls me and I just go "Let her rip. I am ready to go Lord, because I am still on the field working."

Who was somebody in the Bible that had this excellence spirit that you can look at? Job did, Joseph did and Daniel really did. It is amazing. Daniel is somebody God really loved. Why? He admired him. He respected him. God respected Daniel because in a very difficult situation, in the government of another country, he looks every day for God. He worships God every day and he does not care who watches him. He has just such an excellence about him. I love to see it in people. In fact, God said to Satan about Job, "Do you notice My servant Job. There is not anybody on the earth like him. He is the finest man on earth, a man who fears God and will do My will. He will not have anything to do with evil." Very normal people setting the standard of excellence that we can all look up to.

If you are going to pursue excellence in your life starting today, what do you do? First of all, make sure you know your calling or your destiny. Do you not think it is kind of weird that we are in this war and we are supposed to be fighting the devil and all of this evil and yet if you ask somebody "what are your gifts, what is your calling, what does God want you doing?" They say, "I do not know. I do not know. I cannot figure it out." You need to figure it out. You need to busy doing it. God does not want to keep a secret from you. You need to be working. Read the books. Talk to the people. Find out, "God, where am I going, what am I doing, how do you want to use me?" If you say that I cannot ever hear anything when I do that, then say, "Lord, I must be really deaf, say it louder. I am not going to give up until I know what I am supposed to be doing." Consistency is such an important part of excellence. You can start out great and then it is hard to stay with it and consistently be good. That is probably one of the major hallmarks of excellence is it is consistently good. Do you not appreciate businesses that you work with? We have this plumbing company we have come and do work at our house. That man, his name is Gary, I never have to worry if it is going to be done right, if it is going to be done fairly, there is just not going to be anybody who does it better and I know that. How do I know that? Because consistently over about a ten year period any job he has ever done for us is like that. The people he hires do that. He has a guy named Mike who always comes out and reams out our sewer thing. Mike always has this great attitude, this big smile on his face and he does a good job. I never have to even worry. That is how we all need to be. We need to be a person God can count on. We need to be a person people can count on, that no matter what they are going to get a good job out of us, no matter what.

There are five qualities of knowing that you are living this excellent life and doing these excellent things. I want to tell you what they would be. A commitment to fight against what would try to stop you. Courage to step out from the crowd and be different, to pull away from bad influences. You know some of you if you could just get away from those people and those bars and those circumstances, you could have a good life. Pure motives, not really trying to do it just for yourself to make yourself look good; relating to others, being willing to be taught, being willing to work with others, being known as someone who can work well with others, encouraging one another. Another is you can gain excellence at a greater and greater level if you will continue on in your knowledge of God.

God is excellent as I showed you in all of those passages. I showed you how He sees life, how He wants life. He has been very up front with us. He has told us "this is how I want it." If you will keep on moving and just change 10 percent a year in some area, every year, you do not have to make these drastic changes. It is hard for all of us to do that, just a 10 percent change this year, next year, next year, and next year. You will improve more than you could ever imagine, just working 10 percent harder has incredible results. There is just a certain amount of work just to pay the bills. Work about 10 percent harder and you will have some money left over to do what you want to do. Remember, we all have weaknesses. We all have faults but there is a God who loves you. There is a Jesus who cares about you. He died for you. He wants to be your Savior. He wants to be your Lord. Ask Him in to change your life and let you live an excellent life. God bless you.

QUIET TIME QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between excellence and perfectionism?
2. How does Matthew 5:13-16 relate to excellence?
3. How does 1 Corinthians 10:31 tell us we should lead our lives?
4. How do you pursue excellence in your life?
5. What are the five qualities you can measure to determine if you are living a life of excellence?

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