

## CHAPTER ONE

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# THE DEFINITION OF EXCELLENCE: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

From a Biblical standpoint, excellence is not merely a pursuit of perfection but a reflection of our reverence for God and our commitment to serve Him and others with diligence, integrity and humility. In the scriptures, excellence is intertwined with righteousness, wisdom and wholehearted devotion to God. There are various narratives, teachings and parables in the Bible that portray the intricate nature of excellence and provide timeless principles for applying it in our lives.

Human beings have an intrinsic desire to see excellence, experience excellence and even be excellent. There is this desire we all share to be resourceful, progressive, brilliant and balanced in life. Nobody celebrates mediocrity, but in every group, class, tribe or tongue across the world, excellence is prized, celebrated and rewarded. Whether it is a country celebrating a record-breaking athlete or a renowned businessman being celebrated and making the front page of Forbes magazine for his excellent business achievements, everyone is on the lookout for excellence. This is why Nobel Prizes, the Guinness Book of Records and the like exist. Ultimately, God is the rewarder of excellence.

When we read the book of Genesis, chapter one, the account of creation, we are mesmerised by the intentional, detailed and thorough nature of God's creation. It was nothing short of excellent, so much so that God Himself looked at everything He had created, including man, and declared, "It is good," and God cannot lie. That awareness of this creation account and the knowledge that we have been created in the image of God means that God imparted His character and qualities into us (Genesis 1:27). And

just as an apple does not fall far from the tree, we cannot be anything less than excellent because of this divine nature and spiritual birth. Thanks be to God that though the fall of man in the garden of Eden sought to sever man from this nature, we have been redeemed through Christ for the saving of our souls. So, we crave justice because He is just (Psalm 9:16). We love because He is love (1 John 4:16). And we are excellent because He is excellent in everything He does (Deuteronomy 32:4).

Excellence is a very fascinating word in the dictionary. It is defined as 'Now this quality can be ascribed to anything or anyone,' but for the purpose of this book, we will stick to understanding excellence as it concerns a person. Biblically, the quality of being outstanding or extremely good seems to be most applicable when it is seen as the pursuit of, or abounding in virtue. In other words, the behaviour that exudes high moral standards of Christ-like virtues.

"And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, who kneeled to him and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do so that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, 'Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God.'" (Mark 10:17-18).

So, if excellence is the quality of being extremely good and God is the only One who is good, I believe the Bible suggests true excellence is characteristic of people who understand that they have been made in God's image, that they have been 'saved' by what Jesus Christ has done on the cross, and they are striving to live out their everyday lives expressing this excellence with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, the New American Standard Bible translates virtue in Philippians 4:8 as *chayil*, meaning excellence, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." This scripture also tells us that excellence does not

start from (or is not just) what you do, what you become, where you arrive at or what you achieve; it starts from what you think about and what you meditate on. The things you think about are only a product of the things you allow into your mind through the gates of your mind. These gates are your five senses, but mostly your senses of sight and hearing. This is why you must continuously renew your mind through the word of God as a believer, to fully access and manifest this nature.

### **Misconceptions About Excellence**

Contrary to what most people think, excellence is not doing better than everyone else. At best, this idea of excellence is selfish and self-serving – seeking one’s glory or the applause of others. Excellence is independent of other people’s journeys or achievements. It is personal to you. It is about being your best, not compared to anyone else. Just ‘your best.’

Another common misconception about excellence is that excellence is the same as success, but this is not the case. Brian Harbour (*Rising Above the Crowd*) says, “Success means being the best. Excellence means being your best. Success, to many, means being better than everyone else. Excellence means being better tomorrow than you were yesterday. Success may mean exceeding the achievements of other people. Excellence means matching your practice with your potential.” Success is not excellence, but excellence is the currency of success. One cannot be particularly successful without having been extremely good or excellent. The pursuit of excellence comes from knowing who we are in Christ and doing our best with the knowledge that we have and with the other resources available to us, to God’s glory in everything we do and in every place we are found. Excellence is rooted in growing, improving and pressing on, not with eye service or watchfulness of the scoreboard or checking who else is watching.

Also, excellence is not perfection nor is it laziness. This is another common misconception. Perfection is an illusion that we stop you from becoming.

If excellence were perfection, the Bible would not admonish us to keep adding to our faith and to increasingly get better.

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:5-8).

As pilgrims, we are on a journey on this earth, and we are continually being made perfect (Ephesians 4:12). But the spirit of excellence has been imparted to us by nature of who we are in Christ (Daniel 5:12), but it doesn't end there. We need to renew our minds and, by so doing, strengthen our bodies to work out excellence in our lives. For instance, you cannot say that because you have an excellent spirit or the nature of God (which is excellent), you cannot fail your upcoming exam, so you go to bed and relax and sleep and do not read in preparation for the exams. You will fail mercilessly because excellence is not laziness. Daniel had an excellent spirit, so he went in prayer and enquired of the Lord for the interpretation of the dream of the king. In fact, it is because you know you have an excellent spirit that you cannot afford to be lazy or complacent. The excellent spirit is your advantage and an enabler for exploits.

It is expedient that we understand that excellence is a lifestyle. That in whatever we do from the moment we wake up till we go back to bed, we are called to be excellent as a service to the Lord. Whether it is sweeping streets or running a country, making the bed or stitching a torn garment, we should strive for excellence in work ethic, in character and craftsmanship. No one is a guru at everything, but we're all good at something. God expects us to develop the skills and gifts He's given us to serve Him and others better.