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**ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE
IN VOCATION AND
PROFESSIONAL CAREER**

DEFINITION

EXCELLENCE

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines excellence as the quality of being extremely good. This suggests that excellence is not in the quantity of the good achievements of one's life or lifetime but rather the quality of what the totality of his life represents. Genuine excellence goes beyond mere achievements or attainments in some aspects of life like our professional or career; it is the fulfilment of an overall divine purpose that brings a man into peace, rest, and the certainty of eternal life.

VOCATION AND PROFESSION

The main difference between Vocation and Profession is that the Vocation is an occupation to which a person is specially drawn or for which he or she is suited, trained, or qualified and Profession is a vocation founded upon specialized educational training. From the biblical perspective, both vocation and profession are simply the platform (whatever it is) which divine guardianships and providence have led a person into in order to fulfil God's purpose for creating him or her.

When God created Adam, it was with a purpose. He was to administer the entire earth and ensure that the devil did not take over. For the sake of this, God created a Garden in Eden and placed him there. Every of his activity thereafter was to fulfil that purpose, which was to subdue the earth and keep it under the rule and authority of God. That was His vocation, occupation, and career. God was His employer and therefore met all his needs.

But after the fall, he still worked and was engaged in several activities, but it was now no longer for God, but for himself, to meet his personal and other selfish needs.

But Christ came to redeem us all from the fall and its attending curses. We have now by redemption been restored back to fellowship and partnership with Him. Consequently, all activities which constitute our vocation or occupation becomes the platform or opportunities to showcase or be a witness for Christ among the various segments of people and places where God through our gifts, vocation, occupation or careers have located us here on earth. It is even upon the basis of this which Christ gave us the great commission and upon which we are to fulfill it.

In God's purpose therefore, our occupation, vocation or profession are a critical segment of His will and purpose for every of His children. It is through it that He administers and place us wherever He chooses to manifest Himself and His abilities through us to the outside world. That is why we cannot be careless and shoddy about our vocation or occupation because it directly marred or impact our confession and testimony of Christ. We shall for the above reasons critically study the Christian concepts and characteristics of excellence and the ways to pursue it.

THE CONCEPT AND CHARACTERISTICS OF EXCELLENCE

1. EXCELLENCE IS FIRST A LIFE AND A SPIRIT!

The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour: but the way of the wicked seduceth them. *Proverbs 12:26.*

Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes because an excellent

spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. *Daniel 6:3*

Excellence is a spirit and for everyone who is in Christ, excellence is given. It comes with the redemption package. The Bible declares that Jesus obtained a more excellent ministry which is steered by an even more excellent Spirit and consequently it was reported of Christ:

And they were overwhelmingly astonished, saying, He has done everything excellently (commendably and nobly)! *Mar 7:37 Amp.*

The Bible went further to say, "...as He is, so are we in this world," *1John 4:17*. This implies that we share in the same LIFE and SPIRIT of excellence with Christ! It is therefore essential that you know that Supernatural excellence is a substance that is created by the operation of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Therefore, before we can attain excellence, we must first realize that the same Spirit which distinguished Daniel has been given to us under a better covenant.

2. EXCELLENCE WILL THEREFORE INVOLVE THE DELIBERATE PURSUIT OF CHRIST. *Col. 1:16-17, Eph 2:10 Amp, Phil 3:7-8 Kjo.*

The pursuit, the growth, and manifestation of Christ-life; His purpose, His will, method and motive is a critical element in the manifestation of excellence in any person. Since all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, (including all professions, vocations, and careers) in this world were created by Him and for Him, every professional career pursuit therefore, that does not consist (or find its meaning) in Christ will never produce excellence in God's sight. You may even become an accomplished celebrity of world repute, yet your life will be a lamentation in heaven. Excellence outside Christ Jesus is a wasted life. No man is excellent in life when he/she is separate and not integrated in Christ. Christ must be before your career and profession before you can ever be excellent in it. For all your activities (profession and vocation) to take shape, it must first be located in His calling and purpose for creating you.

3. EXCELLENCE IS A CHOICE! *Phil 1:9-10, Phil 2:13.*

Though excellence is a spiritual treasure locked away in the chest of our human spirit, however, the manifestation of it requires a deliberate outworking in the believer's everyday living. We need to unlock it by deliberate choices form day to day! After all, the journey of Daniel and his friends into prominence began when Daniel and his circle of friends determined and decided that they were not going to defile themselves with the king's meat. This is very instructive as an example to those who seek to experience the unhindered flow of excellence in their lives. You must DECIDE before excellence can be DEPLOYED in your life! Daniel chose to be excellent, and we read about how he was preferred. While the seed of excellence is undeniably resident within you, you must fan it to flame through the agency of spirited determination laced with an array of deliberate steps and principled lifestyle cultivated just like Daniel and his friends did.

4. EXCELLENCE ASSUMES PRIORITIES. *Judges 9:8-15, Rom 12:3-7, Eph 4:7*

It not only has to do with doing one thing well but also is concerned with a choice between goals. There are some goals that are less worthy, less honoring to God, goals that fall short of all that God intends us to be. It is not that there is one right way for all men, but rather that a potential for excellence in some area lies in all men. We are called to live a life in which we need to do many things, but within which we are called to do

some of those things with excellence. Certainly we are to excel where we are gifted most or to exercise one gift to its fullest potential. We must not become “a jack of all trade and master of none.” As it is commonly said: “you bloom where you are planted”.

5. EXCELLENCE IS NEITHER IN COMPETITION NOR IN A QUEST FOR SUPERIORITY.

In the American Heritage Dictionary, excellence is defined as “The state, quality, or condition of excelling, superiority. The word excel is defined as, “to do or be better than; surpass; to show superiority, surpass others.” Then under the word excel, the following terms are listed and explained as synonyms for excel. The words excel, surpass, exceed, transcend, outdo, outstrip all suggest the concept of going beyond a limit or standard. To excel is to be preeminent (excels at figure skating) or to be or perform at a level higher than that of another or others (excelled her father as a lawyer). To surpass another is to be superior in performance, quality, or degree: is surpassed by few as a debater; happiness that surpassed description.

Brian Harbour* says, “Success means being the best” but, “Excellence means being your best”. Success, to many, means being better than everyone else. Excellence means being better tomorrow than you were yesterday. Success means exceeding the achievements of other people. Excellence means matching your practice with your potential.” *Leading the Way by Paul Borthwick, Navpress, 1989, p. 64.

Excellence is not determined by comparing our scores or performance to someone else’s. The pursuit of excellence comes from doing our best with what we have to God’s glory and with a view to growing and improving, but not with a view to the score or who is watching from man’s standpoint. So then, biblically speaking, the pursuit of excellence refers to pursuing and doing the best we can with the gifts and abilities God gives, giving our best to the glory of God. But ideally, it is done without the spirit of competition or seeking to excel simply to be better than others. Excellence includes doing common, everyday things, but in very uncommon ways regardless of whether people are watching. The reality is that God sees our work and rewards us accordingly (*cf. 1 Cor. 15:58*).

6. EXCELLENCE IS AN ALL-INCLUSIVE PURSUIT

Whatever your hand finds to do, verily, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in grave where you are going. *Eccl 9:10*.

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. *1 Cor. 10:31*.

Both passages above point us to the all-inclusive nature of the pursuit of excellence. The words, “whatever your hand finds to do” and “whatever you do” point to the importance of doing our very best in everything we do.

Everything includes things we love and are passionate about, or things that has been forced upon us by necessity or obligations of duties. Irrespective of whether what we are to do belongs to us or to others- whether it is our personal business, or we have been hired by others *Luke 16:10-12*.

Ecclesiastes teaches us that faith in God and living one’s life for Him is the only reasonable motive for living. This means that the strength and abilities we have are to be used to take advantage of the opportunities God gives us as they lie in the scope

of our gifts, strength, His leading, and our responsibilities. Besides encouraging his readers to enjoy life as God enabled them, Solomon also encouraged them to work diligently. The idiom “whatever your hand finds to do” means “Whatever presents itself for you to do” (cf. *1 Sam. 10:7*). If it is a task worth doing, it is a task worth doing right and diligently. Can you make a list of as many areas as we can think of where the pursuit of excellence should touch and change our lives. Be specific! Are there any areas or tasks that I have not really taken seriously, and I need to work on? Scripture says, “whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God” (*1 Cor. 10:31*).

7. EXCELLENCE IS NOT LIMITED BY THE NATURE OF THE TASK

1King 10:1-8

The emphasis of the exhortation in *1 Corinthians 10:31* is that we are to do whatever we do, whether it is viewed as important by society or very menial and insignificant, whether one is the president of a large company or one who cleans the offices at night, all is to be done to the glory of God. Regardless what we do, it deserves our best for in the long run, it reflects on the honor and glory of our God and will ultimately be rewarded by Him (*1 Cor. 15:58*). The society which scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a menial activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. “Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water”.

So then, dear brothers and sisters, be firm. Do not be moved! Always be outstanding (“abounding, doing over and above, excelling”) in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. *1 Corinthians 15:58*.

A. PURSUING AND ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE.

I. The New birth Experience. *Jn. 3:3-7, 1 Pet.1:24, Roms. 3:23, Gen. 49:3-4, Phil. 3:14.*

The old life with all his labours can never be excellent. All his career accomplishments will end up as grass and as flower that fades away. Unless a man is born of God, bearing Christ life, he/she will always and ever fall short of God’s ordained excellence for him. Reuben was born to be excellent in life but sin crippled all the dignity and glory that God planned for him. Unless a man is born again, he can never attain the mark/goal of excellence in his/her professional career in Christ.

II. Discipleship – God’s means of training for Excellence. *Dan. 1:3-4, Esth. 2:12-15.*

Excellence is not achieved by good education and exposure only; you must be trained for it and discipleship is a tool. Whereas mentoring can train your skills for excellence but it is discipleship that trains your life, character, carriage, compartment and career. It was the life that Shedrach, Meshach and Abednego bore that differentiated them in their training. So good training/education alone will not make you end excellently. It is beyond packaging; discipleship trains both the CONTENT and CONTAINER. Esther came out different from the other pageants because of discipleship training of life and character under Mordecai.

III. Kingdom living as a steward.

Eph. 4:1, Phil. 1:20-21, Roms. 12:1, 14:7-9, 2Cor. 5:14-15(LB).

Any man that that will achieve kingdom excellence in his/her professional career

must resolve not to live for himself but unto Christ. A man of excellence does not live to make a name or die for a name. Your first vocation in life is to carry Christ life into your career as your most reasonable service. It is only by being a living sacrifice offered unto the LORD that we can both live a life that is pleasing to Him and achieve the excellence He planned for us.

B. PRACTICALITY OF PURSUING EXCELLENCE.

YOUR MOTIVES FOR THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE.

I. THE GLORY OF GOD

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. *Mat 5:16*.

So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God *1 Corinthians 10:31*.

In thinking about biblical motives for the pursuit of excellence we are brought face-to-face with the issue of the chief purpose for the Christian life. From the above passages, we are reminded that whatever we do (in keeping with our purpose) is to glorify God. This naturally includes pursuing excellence. Youths must constantly be reminded that nothing less than the glory of God should be the motive for whatever they do and how they do it. To glorify God means to bring honor and greater respect to God's name among men and even the angelic world who watch the behavior of the church (see *Eph. 3:10*).

2. THE PRINCIPLE OF REDEEMING THE TIME, USING OUR OPPORTUNITIES.

Eccl. 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, verily, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going. *Ecclesiastes 9:10b*, "for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going" brings us to the climax of Solomon's point in this verse. It may be that Jesus Christ was paraphrasing verse 10 when he said, "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work" (*John 9:4*). After death a person will have no further opportunities for work; there will be neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

3. DON'T BE LAZY/SLOTHFUL. *Prov.18:9(NLT), 21:25(MSG), Roms. 12:11(LB)*.

The slothful man is a vandalizer, a destroyer and a saboteur. He does not only destroy his chances of excellence but that of any person associated with him. He/she can dream and aspire great things but due to his lazy attitude to life, he will never attain to the excellence he desires. God also rewards every genuine diligence for excellence and frowns at slacks as noticed in *Matt. 19:29*. Therefore, we must be aglow and fervent in our pursuit and expression of excellence in our vocations.

4. STAY FOCUSED ON YOUR PURSUIT. *1 Cor. 9:25-26, phil. 3:13-14*.

Young men seeking to be excellent in their professional career must not be distracted from their goal. They must keep their minds focused on the goal until they attain their pursuit. They must be men who run straight for the goal with purpose in every

step. For Paul, finishing his course with joy was the excellence he sought to attain and which he did by deliberately forgetting the past achievements, victories in order to press for the glory that awaited him. The pursuit of excellence from a biblical world view is always connected with the issue of God's values and priorities. This means the pursuit of excellence must include the elimination of some things even though they may be good and legitimate. The principle is: Are they the best and will they get in the way or hinder the main objectives of a Christian's life based on biblical principles and values? If so, they need to be eliminated. We see this truth in Paul's statement in *1 Corinthians 10:23*, "All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify" (see also *1 Cor. 6:12*). Just because they are legitimate does not mean they should be chosen or pursued.

5. BE WHOLE-HEARTED BUT NOT A WORK-A-HOLICH

Whatever your hand finds to do, verily, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going *Ecd 9:10*.

Jesus said to him, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment *Mat. 23:37-38*.

These three passages point us to the importance of whole-heartedness' in whatever we do as Christians. But even more basic than that, *Deuteronomy 6:5* and *Matthew 23:37* teach us that pursuing excellence is a matter of the heart of the inner person and proceeds from an inner reality or existence that is rooted in a faith and relationship with God.

CONCLUSION.

Serve the Lord Christ! Another awesome reason for the pursuit of excellence is that our toil in the Lord is never in vain if done in His strength or by the enabling ministry of the Spirit of God. All Christians will one day stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to receive back for what they have done while alive in this life.

1 Corinthians 3:11-15

For no one can lay any foundation other than what is being laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, each builder's work will be plainly seen, for the Day will make it clear, because it will be revealed by fire. And the fire will test what kind of work each has done. 14 If what someone has built survives, he will receive a reward. 15 If someone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

The consequences of the dishonor to the Lord, failure to be a blessing to others, failing to use our opportunities, and the possibility of the loss of rewards should be a further motivations for the pursuit of excellence.

DISCUSSIONS

1. Make a list of as many areas you can think of where the pursuit of excellence should touch and change your life.
2. Are there any areas or tasks that you have not really taken seriously and need to work on?

3. Describe the areas of your life where you are pursuing excellence purely for the glory of God.
4. In what areas in your life are you pursuing excellence for your own success and not for the glory of God?
5. Why is it important to “redeem time” and to “use your opportunities”?
6. What pursuits would you give up?
7. What specifically would you focus on?

GROUP DISCUSSION:

What will be the most radical change in your life when you pursue excellence solely for the glory of God, for the redemption of your time and opportunities, and only for eternal rewards?

Discuss practically what excellence would mean to you as a young man or woman under the following, drawing from the passage in *Dan 1:6*.

A. CHRIST

B. CHARACTER

C. CHARISMA

D. CARRIAGE

E. CARREER

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