

CHARACTERISTIC TWO: VIRTUE

Lesson 6: Living a Life of Excellence

In our last lesson we talked about the first aspect of virtue, moral goodness, in this one we will discuss the second part of virtue, excellence. When I speak of excellence, I am not talking about perfectionism, but rather having an attitude and spirit of excellence in everything one does. Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines excellence as, "Superior, very good of its kind: eminently good: First Class."¹ In other words, top notch. Unfortunately, there are many people, including some Christians, that lack this important characteristic, they would rather get along by doing the bare minimum. However, as followers of Christ and according to examples in God's Word, we aren't afforded the option to just skate by.

The Apostle Paul tells in Colossians 3:23-24, "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ."² Whatever you do! Whether on the job, at school, at home, at church, whatever and for whoever, do it with all your heart like you're doing it for the Lord. In other words, everything that you do, do it with a spirit of excellence. From the smallest most insignificant job to the most complex, do it with excellence. I remember when I served as a Dental Technician in the US Navy, it would burn me up when I would hear other sailors say, "That's good enough for government work!" What?! Not for me! From swabbing or buffing decks to finishing a crown that would spend years in someone's mouth, I tried to do everything with excellence, because I knew the Lord was always watching.

When I think of excellence, my mind always goes back to two Patriarchs, Joseph & Daniel. Joseph was one of the younger sons of Jacob, as well as very favored by his father. His brothers became jealous of him, mocked his dreams and sold him into slavery. He was taken to Egypt and ended up in Potipher's house. But Joseph exuded the characteristic of virtue. He was both morally good and excellent, therefore God's favor was on his life and because of this, his master's house prospered. Potipher then promoted him to become the overseer of his home & all his affairs. Amid this, Potipher's wife tried to seduce Joseph into sleeping with her. Let's read this portion of the story in Genesis 39:7-11:

⁷ And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." ⁸ But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. ⁹ *There is no one greater in this house than I,*

nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you *are* his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

¹⁰ So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her *or* to be with her.³

Potiphar's wife eventually falsely accused Joseph of rape, and he was thrown into prison. Despite this, Joseph excelled even in prison, to the point that the chief jailer put him over all the prisoners and the Lord made whatever Joseph did to prosper. After many years, Joseph was released from prison and put in command of all of Egypt and God used him to prepare Egypt for a great famine and save many people, including his own father and the brothers that had earlier betrayed him. I believe it all came from Joseph putting God first and keeping a spirit of excellence in whatever circumstance he found himself in.

Like Joseph, Daniel found himself in captivity. Also, like Joseph, he excelled in everything that he put his hand to. After many years and a new king, Daniel's peers became jealous of him because the King was about to set him over the entire kingdom. Let's pick up the story in Daniel 6:1-5:

¹ It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; ² and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss. ³ Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an **excellent spirit was in him**; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm. ⁴ So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. ⁵ Then these men said, "We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God."⁴

Daniel's peers played to the king's pride and deceptively got him to sign a decree that proclaimed if anyone bowed to anyone other than the king himself, they would cast into a den of lions. But because of his faith and love for God, as well as his excellent spirit, Daniel defied the decree and continued to bow and pray to the God of heaven. As a result, he was thrown into the lion's den. However, God delivered Daniel and those that accused him, including their families were thrown into the lion's den and were destroyed. Daniel was restored to his position, all because he trusted God and had an excellent spirit.

This is same spirit that I believe God wants us to have as believers, especially as men who are leaders, husbands, fathers and grandfathers. But I believe it starts with our attitude. Not an attitude of pride because we do things with excellence, but one of

humility, because we are given the opportunity to be an example of excellence for those around us to follow. I want to encourage you to examine your heart and ask the Lord, what areas you need to have more of an excellent spirit in and then regardless of the task, great or small to approach it wholeheartedly as you are doing it for the Lord, because ultimately, you are.

Lesson 6 Questions

1. What is excellence?
2. Why is it important to live a life of excellence?
3. What is an example of being excellent even when no one else is looking?
4. What's an area of your life that you know you need to be more excellent in?

¹ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*.¹ (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 2003).

² *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Col 3:23–24.

³ Ge 39:7–10 (NKJV).

⁴ Da 6:1–5 (NKJV).