



PURSUING EXCELLENCE

*'Going Beyond the
Ordinary'*

by Matt German

Psa. 16:3 "As for the saints who are in the earth, they are the excellent ones in whom is all My delight."

As believers in Messiah we are called to a life of excellence, not to be 'Casual Christians' or 'Mediocre Messianics'. Excellence is defined as "the state or quality of excelling or being exceptionally good; extreme merit; superiority; an action, characteristic, feature, etc., in which a person excels" (World English Dictionary).

We often consider the great men and women of the Bible as iconic and heroic figures. While they are examples and role models in many cases, we need to be careful not to make the mistake of looking at them and thinking that they were somehow 'special' or 'better' than us. They didn't start out that way! The vast majority of people that Yahweh worked through were ordinary men and women. They had their weaknesses, imperfections, and flaws even AFTER they started walking with Him. In fact, Yahweh has always used the "underdog" to accomplish His will and purpose: Moses was a man "slow of speech"; David was the youngest son of Jesse and a mere shepherd boy; Gideon considered himself the "least of the least"; and even Yahshua's initial 12 disciples were unlearned men. What made the difference in every case was their heart condition – their commitment to the Kingdom and their pursuit of the King.

Excellence must be pursued in order to be achieved – it won't just "happen". Every great achievement is the result of pursuit.

Dan 6:1-4 It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred twenty satraps (SEY-traps, princes or under-governors), who should be throughout the whole kingdom; ² and over them three presidents, of whom Daniel was one; that these satraps might give account to them, and that the king should have no damage (loss). ³ Then this Daniel was distinguished above the presidents and the satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. ⁴ Then the presidents and the satraps sought to find occasion against Daniel as touching the

kingdom; but they could find no occasion nor fault, because he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.

Daniel was distinguished above the presidents and princes "because an excellent spirit was in him" (v3). The word 'excellent' is translated from the Hebrew *yattîyr* ³⁴⁹³, which means "preeminent; very:- exceeding, excellent."

Again, we can look at Daniel and think that he was somehow extraordinary in and of himself. But it was the excellent spirit in him that made the difference. The question I have for you is, do you have an excellent Spirit in you? If you are a believer and have received Yahweh's Spirit, then you do have an excellent Spirit in you.

Another interesting verse in the book of Daniel is this: "those that know their Elohim shall be strong and do exploits" (Dan. 11:32). We need to have the boldness to appropriate this for ourselves, personalizing it and saying with confidence, "I know my Elohim. Because I know Him, I shall be strong and do exploits". The reality is that He has given us His Spirit for just that purpose – to be strong and do exploits.

In pursuing excellence you've got to start where you're at. Many times we want to wait until all conditions are right or the circumstances are conducive to accomplish great things. But the reality is that we just have to start. The sooner you start, the sooner you'll get there.

We also need to realize that no one starts out 'perfect'. While we want to do it right, we have to recognize that people very rarely do something new right the first time. We must be willing to make mistakes – and then learn from them and move forward.

In addition, we need to recognize that talent or gifting will only take a person so far. The world is full of people who have natural gifts and talents who never accomplish anything really great. It's what you do with your gifts that matters. Those who truly excel do so not just because of some inherent talent but because of attitude, determination, and hard work.

Speaking of the craftsmen that David assembled for the temple to be constructed under King Solomon, the Bible says that they were "all men who (were) skillful in every manner of work" (1 Chr. 22:15). Similarly, the men assembled by David for the "praise and worship band" are described as "all who were skillful" (see 1 Chr. 25:1, 6-7).

Skill is more than just talent – skill comes from practice, from doing. Professional athletes, musicians, and others all practice

continually. They work at their craft. There's a saying that "practice makes perfect". That's not really true. A more correct statement is: "Persistent practice of the proper things makes perfect." Practicing the wrong things will not lead to perfection or excellence, nor will inconsistent practice.

'Pursuing excellence' implies that it's a process, a journey. It also implies effort, a quest, a stretching. If it were easy, everybody would do it!

James 5:17-18 Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it didn't rain on the earth for three years and six months. ¹⁸ He prayed again, & the sky gave rain, and the earth brought forth its fruit.

Elijah, that great prophet of Yahweh, was "a man of like passions with us". He wasn't some untouchable superhero. In fact, one of the great ironies of his life and ministry is that, immediately after facing down the 450 false prophets of Baal, we find him running from Jezebel, a solitary woman! (see 1 Kings 19:1-3). Yet when he "prayed fervently" it brought forth tremendous results.

7 Keys to Excellence

1. Desire. We could also call it passion or zeal. Desire is a key to achieving excellence because, regardless of the endeavor, any great pursuit will face adversity. We need a strong desire in order to overcome the temptation to quit. Yahshua was driven by a burning desire to accomplish the Father's will. At twelve years of age He said, "Didn't you know that I must be about My Father's business?" Nothing was more important to Him than fulfilling the Father's will and purpose for His life. We, too, must have that kind of desire.

1 Cor. 14:12 "So you also, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to excel to the edifying of the Body"

2. Singleness of Purpose:

a. Priorities. We must set priorities by identifying what is important – and what is most important – and then acting accordingly.

b. Focus. In order to pursue excellence, it is crucial to keep our focus. The Bible teaches that "a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8). The literal meaning of the word translated as double-minded is 'two-spirited' [*DIP-SOO-khos*]. We must keep our eyes on the prize and not be distracted by things going on around us.

3. Attitude. Having the proper attitude is crucial in any endeavor. It includes a willingness to do whatever we have to do to grow, get better, and overcome adversity.

4. Be Teachable. Seek out and learn from those who have

gone before – those who have done it the 'right way', successfully. This will save a lot of time and effort in the long run. 'Trial and error' is a hard taskmaster for success.

5. Work Ethic. This speaks to the practical side of things – how you go about your business. We could also call it discipline. It basically consists of three parts:

a. Commitment – you must settle in your own heart that you won't settle for less than your best in your walk. It means making a quality decision.

b. Diligence – "constant and earnest effort to accomplish what is undertaken; persistent exertion of body or mind." It means to do what you're doing, well.

Col. 3:17, 23 "... whatever you do, in word or in deed, do all in the Name of the Master... whatever you do, do it heartily (*ex-psuché* – 'from or out of the spirit'), as to the Lord and not to men"

Whatever you do, do it as an offering back to Yahweh by the Spirit.

c. Consistency – of action and of attitude.

6. Perseverance. You will face opposition in your pursuit of excellence and you will be given the opportunity to quit. Develop the mentality that says "failure is not an option".

Pro. 24:16 "The righteous man falls seven times, and rises up again"

1 Jo. 4:4 "Greater is He who is in me than he who is in the world"

Rom. 8:37 "In all things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us"

7. Paying the Price. There is a price to pay for excellence. Most people aren't willing to pay it. Are you?

1 Cor. 9:24-27 Don't you know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run like that, that you may win. ²⁵ Every man who strives in the games exercises self-control in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. ²⁶ I therefore run like that, as not uncertainly. I fight like that, as not beating the air, ²⁷ but I beat my body and bring it into submission, lest by any means, after I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected.

Paul was willing to pay the price in order to receive the prize. Likewise we must commit to pursuing excellence in our individual lives and callings, as husbands and wives, as parents, etc. But we must also commit to pursuing excellence as a Body – "because an excellent Spirit is in us".

Get Out of Your Comfort Zone

It's human nature to want things comfortable and convenient. Our entire culture is built on that premise. Yet nothing truly great was ever accomplished with the "comfortable and convenient" approach. The Biblical record bears witness to that – every great man of Scripture had to forsake comfort and convenience in order to become the man of Kingdom purpose that Yahweh had called him to be. More specifically, every one of them had to leave the comforts of home and launch out into the unknown. Abram was one such man.

Gen. 12:1 "Now Yahweh said to Abram, 'Get out of your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you.'"

In order for Yahweh to fulfill His purpose through Abram, it was essential that Abram get away from his past – those things that, while good at one time in his life, no longer represented Yahweh's purpose and calling. And he had to do this by faith – when he left home, he couldn't even see the land of promise, nor did he even know exactly where he was going:

Hebr. 11:8 "By faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out to the place which he was to receive for an inheritance. He went out, not knowing where he went."

Abram simply had to start walking and allow Yahweh to reveal the land to him in due season.

Like Abram, Elisha left his home simply based on the call of Yahweh. Others, like Joseph (son of Jacob) and Moses, were driven out. Still others, like Noah and David, were sent out by circumstance. Regardless of the impetus for their departure, though, each of them ultimately had to leave the past behind in order to embrace his purpose and calling. It's a basic truth that you cannot pursue Yahweh's vision for your future while you're still living in the past!

Why does Yahweh take us out of familiar surroundings in order to fulfill His purpose in our lives? First, ours is a walk of faith, and faith is seldom compatible with comfort and convenience. Yahweh must take away those things that represent comfort and convenience so that we may truly live by faith. Second, the axiom that "familiarity breeds contempt" is a true statement. I call this the "stifle factor" – those who know us after the flesh will be the ones most likely to reject the vision that Yahweh has given us. At least we can take solace in the fact that even Yahshua Himself had to contend with this:

Mark 6:1-6 "(Yahshua) went out from there. He came into His own country, and His disciples followed Him. When the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue, and many hearing Him were astonished, saying, 'Where did this

man get these things?' and, 'What is the wisdom that is given to this man, that such mighty works come about by His hands? Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? Aren't His sisters here with us?' They were offended at Him. Yahshua said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own relatives, and in his own house.' He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick folk, and healed them. He marveled because of their unbelief. He went around the villages teaching."

Prior to this Yahshua had already healed a leper, a man with a withered hand, cast out demons, calmed the stormy seas, healed the woman with the issue of blood, and raised Jairus' daughter from the dead (see Mark 3-5), but His own townspeople still only knew Him as "the carpenter, the son of Mary." They simply could not reconcile their preconceptions with the One confronting them, and this caused them to become offended at Him, limiting the mighty works that He could do among them. He had to go to other villages – places where they didn't "know Him after the flesh" – in order to continue His ministry. We can expect the same response from those who know us only as we once were. As we continue to rise up, walking in more Kingdom authority and power, they will – in all likelihood – not be able to reconcile who we used to be with who we are in Messiah. This might even (or especially) be true of those who have known us in "religious" settings. As we leave our comfort zone, it will leave others uncomfortable. Unless they are led of the Spirit, they will be unable to follow.

Matt. 12:46-50 "While He (Yahshua) was yet speaking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and His brothers stood outside, seeking to speak to Him. One said to Him, 'Behold, your mother and your brothers stand outside, seeking to speak to You.' But He answered him who spoke to Him, 'Who is My mother? Who are My brothers?' He stretched out His hand towards His disciples, and said, 'Behold, My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother, and sister, and mother.'"

Those who do the will of Yahweh are those who are true brothers and sisters of Messiah – and IN Messiah. Those who do not will tend to hinder your purpose in Yahweh. You can still love them, care about them, and pray for them, but you cannot walk with them in Kingdom purpose as long as they refuse to do His will and walk with you:

Amos 3:3 "Can two walk together, unless they agree?"

While we must honor familial relationships, it must never be at the expense of obeying Yahweh! We must be willing to leave the temporal things for the eternal, to get out of our comfort zone in order to pursue Yahweh's purpose for our lives. That is the only path that will take us to the greater works.

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