

Excellence, Going Beyond Expectation

By Melanie Stone

Excellence means to excel. In the Word of God, excellence is a word that means to go beyond what is expected.

There was a time I was the teacher of a preschool class, and the kids were doing hands-on activities to reinforce the lesson focus. I was overseeing a group at my learning center, and a little boy started forcefully banging his head onto the table over and over. I stopped him and gently raised his face to get his attention. His big, tear-filled eyes looked back at me, and he cried, "I made a mistake." I spoke with his mother after class. She explained that his father had abandoned them, and as much as she tried to tell the boy otherwise, the boy was convinced the reason his father left was because the boy wasn't good enough. As a result, the boy felt hatred towards himself and punished himself when he felt he was less than perfect.

Perfection is not excellence.

Have you ever been disappointed in yourself? I have. After all, God is perfect, and His standard for holiness is to always be and do and have the perfect thing, right? No pressure there, eh?

In the church world, some people seem to keep that high standard with ease. They have the perfect family, the perfect kids, the perfect home, the perfect job. We generally assess ourselves by comparing ourselves to others. It's not uncommon for Christians to feel comparison and put on appearances to hide their flaws, feeling shame for their shortcomings. Then there is the fear of being judged and punished... and the guilt, oh the guilt! To find some relief from shame, fear and guilt, sometimes Christians, in an attempt to feel better about themselves, will notice and bring attention to the flaws in others. Even though saved, this person is still trying to earn favor with God and others based on their behavior. Friends, this isn't the relationship God wants to have with us or with each other.

We need to stop trying to be sufficient in ourselves alone. We need to lean on His sufficiency of grace. This is real faith, and His grace is more than sufficient! Christians who understand grace know they don't have a self-righteous leg to stand on. They freely accept God's grace with arms wide open with no restraint. They consider themselves to be fully accepted by God based on His love, and they celebrate their position in Christ. With the grace they continually live under, they freely share a message of grace with others. Feelings of shame, guilt or fear roll off of them like water off a duck's back. They grieve when they see others struggling with condemnation. If someone tries to put judgment on them, they quickly laugh it off and give God praise for what Jesus has done for them.

Having high standards isn't necessarily wrong, when it's from received grace. We often hurt ourselves when we demand too much out of a self-righteousness stance, and we often don't even realize we're doing it. We also can push people away when we set high standards for them because we are trying to give them a good life the same way we are trying to make a good life, maybe a child or a team member. We all need God's grace.

If you are interested in studying what the Bible has to say about excellence, please read the rest of this article as someone who lives in such liberty.

The Bible Meaning of Excellence

I did a little word study on excellence. In the Aramaic, the meaning of the word is, “more than ordinary.” It describes a person that works diligently to recognize what is normal and to go over and above it; to be extraordinary.¹ Because of the extra effort, an excellent, hard-working person will exceed, surpass and be abundant. It is used to describe Daniel, a man who went over and above the call of duty, serving foreign kings as a captive child of Israel.²

I continued to dig, and I looked up the Greek definition.³ The meaning is similar to the Aramaic word, meaning “beyond measure.” Roots for this word⁴ include the word “ballo” meaning “to give force or effort, to throw, to cast, to pour, to arise, to stand.” The other root is “hyper” meaning “to go over and beyond, to give more than, for the sake of.”

Aim to Throw Past The Mark

The Greek word shows us a picture of having a mark to hit when throwing an object, and then giving effort to throwing the object beyond that mark.

A person of excellence recognizes what is expected, and works hard to go beyond expectation. It’s not about being better than the rest; it’s about making sure I am giving my best.

Excellence Has Purpose

One of those root word meanings included the phrase “for the sake of.” Someone with an excellent spirit is someone who has a purpose. They know their “why.” That understanding gives motivation.

Furthermore, the person with an excellent spirit will act for the sake of another. The Strongs gives us further meaning on the root word “hyper.” It means “on behalf of, on the part of, in the stead of, to bend over to shield another. It means to “be on one’s side” and “to favor and further one’s cause, to do that which is for another’s advantage. It also refers to offer offerings for a cause, to sacrifice. It has the idea of suffering and dying for another, in their defense, on their account.

An excellent person is someone that serves God or someone else.

God is Excellent

Knowing the definition of excellence, we can definitely say that God is excellent. God excels at everything He does; He does all things well.

Psalm 8:1 O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens!

¹ BlueLetterBible.com, Aramaic yattiy, Strongs #3493

² Daniel 6:3, 5:12-14,

³ BlueLetterBible.com, Greek hyperbole, Strongs #5236

⁴ BlueLetterBible.com ,Greek hyperballo, Strongs #5235, roots hyper 5228 and ballo #906

We also see God in one of my favorite verses in the word “exceedingly” in Ephesians 3:20. This is the same Greek word for excellent.

Ephesians 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,”

This is what real grace is – when God goes over, above and beyond natural limitations by adding His ability and resources, way beyond the realm of what we can even dream or imagine. It’s excellent!

We also see the excellence of God when He gave us His best, His Son. Jesus, God’s one and only... He gave Him for our sake.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Wow. Think on that for a moment. Personalize it. God, in all His brilliance, gave His best for you.

Jesus Gave His Best For Us

Jesus wasn’t just given to us by the Father. Jesus made choices to give Himself. He chose to leave glory and come to earth in human flesh. He chose to walk the earth and go through times of testing. He touched lepers. He answered the religious sceptics and religious leaders. He came during a time of captivity to Rome. He was abandoned. He was betrayed by his own disciple. He was despised. He was mocked, spat upon, declodhed and humiliated. He was examined, tortured, His beard was pulled out, a crown of thorns pushed into His scalp, whipped with a Roman whip. The Bible says Jesus was beaten so badly that He wasn’t even recognizable. However, nothing compared to the moment He became sin on our behalf, separated for the first time from His Father, crying out with a loud voice, “My God, My God, why have you left Me?”

Not only was Jesus careful to do all things well, but He did all things well **for our sake**.

Jesus was perfect, and yet He loved us in our imperfections. While we were still sinners, He died for us. He performed miracles, and still we doubted. He taught on the Word, and still we went our own way. He preached the kingdom, and still we put Him to death, yet Jesus was known for “doing all things well.” He gave Himself out of His love for us.

Mark 7:37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

God Made You Excellently Excellent

God, in all of His excellence, made you. In Psalm 139, the psalmist tells how we are made in a way that is to be in awe. It says we are each uniquely made, set apart from each other, special. It says we were skillfully brought about as if every thread was woven together perfectly. How is it we can look at God’s handiwork in the heavens, notice the beauty of the mountains or wonder at all the creatures He made; and then look at ourselves in the mirror and completely miss how incredibly different and amazing each of us are? God made us with excellence, each of us, special in who we are, and God, the most magnificent of all, loves us with a deeper love than we could ever realize. We are excellent.

God made us to also do well in life: however, we are not self-sufficient or complete in ourselves. After the fall, we became very imperfect, yet God still encourages us to pursue extraordinary lives by giving our best. He made us complete in His righteousness, removing all guilt, shame and fear. He gave us His authority in the name of Jesus and filled us with His Spirit. Do we fall short of His standard of holiness? Yes. Do we fall short of His glory? Yes. However, God isn't asking for perfection; He's asking for surrender to His grace. God forgives, cleanses, restores and then takes what we have to offer into His hands, looking back into our eyes, and says, "Child, NOTHING is impossible."

God Doesn't Just Want Our Best, He Wants Our All

We love Him because he loved us first. The pursuit to give God our best is not out of mere obligation, but out of a passionate love. God is after more than the excellence we can give Him. He actually wants something more; He wants us.

Think on this. Compared to who God is, who are we? Compared to what God has, what do we have? Compared to what God can do, what can we do? Yet God has chosen to include us in His plan. He has a part of us to play. As soon as we take our humble step with our meager offering, God immediately swoops in with His power and might. All it takes is a faith that will obey, and we invite all of heaven into our circumstance.

If we were to ask Jesus if the cross was worth it, He would answer, "YOU were worth it." As we pursue to excel in serving others, love needs to be our motive and grace has to be our means.

*Colossians 3:23 "...whatever you do, do it heartily (with your all), as to the Lord and not to men."*⁵

Examples of Going Beyond Expectations

Jesus said, if they ask you to go with them one mile, go with them two.⁶ Go beyond the expectation. When our ministry leader asks us to reach a goal, a pursuit of excellence will target to go over and beyond that goal. If we're married, a pursuit of excellence will aim to exceed expectations as a spouse. With business, parenting, friendships, and all endeavors, the ones who excel are the ones who pursue excellence through hard work and by God's grace.

Besides God, Jesus and Daniel, here are some examples of people in the Bible who went beyond expectations:

1. The Hall of Faith

Hebrews 11 gives us a list of people who went above and beyond for God. Among them are Abraham who left his country to claim a promised land, Moses who left royalty to lead grumbling freed slaves through wilderness, Joseph who survived a pit and served in a prison.

Hebrews 6:12 Don't be sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherited the promises.

⁵ Ecclesiastes 9:10

⁶ Matthew 5:41

2. A New Testament Church

In Revelation 3:14-22, Jesus told the Laodiceans that their works aren't hot, nor were they cold. They were lukewarm. Their half-hearted response was disgusting to the One who died in their place. Their attitude was "I am able to take care of me." They were satisfied in self-sufficiency, all the while oblivious to what God wanted to do in them and through them."

We can learn from this church to never take our salvation for granted. We can learn not to sink into complacency or settle for normal. We aren't created for normal. Something on the inside of the born-again believer craves to add God's "super" to our "natural."

3. David

David wanted to worship God by giving an offering. Someone offered to give him the offering, and David responded in 2 Samuel 24:24,

I will not offer to the Lord that which costs me nothing.

As part of giving ourselves, there is giving of our talent, our time, our touch and our treasure. Our heart for God shows up in our giving. It goes beyond the tithe to our local church, what belongs to God, and it gives offerings to the church, to the kingdom and to those in need. Excellence is generous, liberally and extravagantly giving to others.

*2 Corinthians 8:7 **But just as you excel in everything**, [and lead the way] in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in genuine concern, and in your love for us, see that you excel in this gracious work [of giving] also. AMP*

4. The Excellent Wife

Marriage is important, and excellence should be seen in both the husband and the wife. She is intrinsically crafted by her God, suitable to become a sought-after partner in life, able to accomplish many great things, and to do many of those things for the sake of others. If she is married, she is a blessing to her husband. In Proverbs, Solomon mentions an excellent wife on two occasions.

Proverbs 12:24 An excellent wife is the crown of her husband

Proverbs 31:10 An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.

The Hebrew word Chayil is translated excellent. The definition of the word is strong, capable, and hardworking. In Proverbs 31 is an acrostic poem about the excellent wife who gives her best and excels in everything she puts her hand to do. She does her part, and God does His part.

What Excellence Is Not

Sometimes we learn what something is by looking at what it is not. We already mentioned that excellence is not perfection. We are not perfect; however, that doesn't mean we stop striving for excellence at home, in relationships, at work, in ministry or other areas of involvement. The Bible has several mentions of what excellence is not:

Excellence is not laziness.
Excellence is not settling for good enough.
Excellence is not doing something half-heartedly.
Excellence doesn't neglect responsibilities, including the kingdom of God.
Excellence is not about serving myself for personal gain.

Proverbs 6:6; 9-12
Proverbs 12:11
Proverbs 13:4
Proverbs 19:15
Proverbs 24:30-34
Proverbs 31:27
Matthew 25:24-29

Proverbs 10:4, 5
Proverbs 12:24
Proverbs 14:23
Proverbs 20:4
Proverbs 26:15
Ecclesiastes 10:18
2 Thessalonians 3:6-10

Furthermore, excellence is not to be used as a method of religious or any other form of abuse. Some religious abusers could use this Bible truth of excellence as a tool to manipulate people into working harder for them or the church. They demand "excellence" but when the pressure pulls people away from their marriage, their family, their finances, their wellbeing, their rest and other responsibilities, it is harmful to the person serving. That isn't the excellence God asks of us.

Created for Good Works

Ephesians 2:8-10 We are not **saved by** good works, but we are **created for** good works.

We don't earn God's favor by punching a time card or handing God an invoice for kingdom service rendered. God is good; it's His definition. Goodness does not originate with us, but God working through us can accomplish good things. One definition of "good" is what is morally excellent or an excellent kindness. Our design is to display God's goodness in doing good for others.

Why Hold Back?

God doesn't withhold Himself from us or hold back in blessing us when we come to Him in faith.⁷ However, as people, we sometimes do hold back instead of going beyond. God doesn't give excuses for refusing what He has provided through Christ His Son, but He does understand the reasons, even when we don't. God wants to address the reasons for falling short of His glory, restore us and then lead us to freedom.

1. Self-Sufficiency: Control Issues

The opposite of faith is self-sufficiency, which is, control. Some would rather lean on their own limited strength than lean on God in His endless strength. They simply want to be in charge. The Bible also refers to this mentality as pride and rebellion.

As human beings, we often experience control or manipulation from others. In order to keep from being controlled by someone else, there is competition to be the top dog in a dog-eat-dog world.

⁷ Psalm 84:11

We find security in our own talent, ability, strength and resources. Some work hard their entire lifetime to achieve what they will only lose in the end.

Others find security in being in a controlling relationship. They trust the strength of a domineering partner or friend, seeing themselves as insufficient and in need of help.

Control can be seen in the workplace, in governments, in marriages and in families. Even in church, some have used a religious control to get people to give or serve to build a church or ministry. Guilt, shame and fear are the tools in the toolbox of a controlling ministry leader.

A reliant person is able to surrender to the Lord in faith and also yield to others and serve. Control issues are one reason why some people do not trust God or others, holding back their hearts, their offerings and their service. For some, instead of withdrawal, they work to pressure a leader to turn their heart to do what they want rather than allow the leader freedom to seek what God wants. Their rebellion makes it nearly impossible for them to receive correction, which would be to their benefit and to the benefit of the people around them.

2. Self-Preservation: Fear

Some refuse to give their best because they are afraid of being hurt. They put up walls or set boundaries to keep people at a distance or to keep themselves from abuse. Perhaps they live in fear of what they see happening to others. Perhaps they have had a measure of hurt in the past. The fear keeps them from reaching out too far or too much.

Jesus can heal you anywhere you hurt, if you surrender to Him. His love casts out a fear, and we are free to give of ourselves.

3. Self-Focus

Selfishness is an inward focus. Most of the dealings of the selfish are in consideration of how it will benefit them. In regard to a spirit of excellence and spiritual maturity, our desire to give our best isn't just for our own regard, but the regard of someone else, such as God, a leader, and employer, and the like.

4. Self-Doubt

Some people struggle with their self-worth, feeling "less than" in regard to who they are, what they can do and what they possess. Feelings of shame, guilt and fear can keep a person from rising up to offer their best. They struggle with receiving grace.

Rise Up in Excellence

Peter walked on water, but first he had to step out of the boat. We aren't hand puppets of God. We have a choice to make and an action to take.

Our pursuit to give God our best is not out of mere obligation, but out of a passionate love.

Mark 12: 33 And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

*2 Timothy 2:15 **Do your best** to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.⁸*

The time is short, so we need the Holy Spirit to help us make the most of our time. He will lead us on what to do, why to do it, when to do it, how to do it, where to do it, and with whom to do it with.

Ephesians 5:16 "make the most of every opportunity."

Our pursuit of excellence should point to the excellency of our powerful God and the grace of our loving Father. When people see you, they may notice your flaws, but that's okay. You be a trophy of God's grace, meant to shine His glory! Shine on!

Excellence is the Good Life

In the Scriptures, when someone spoke of excellence, they also spoke of promotion and reward. If we want to live a blessed life, then we should learn and apply what God considers to be excellent. If we want to develop in our calling, we should care about excellence. If we want to increase our effectiveness and live abundantly, we should pay attention to excellence. If we want to properly represent the Lord to the world around us, then we should concern ourselves with excellence. It is possible, especially by the grace of God to put us over and the power of the Holy Spirit to go beyond our personal limits.

⁸ John 2:17 zeal for Your house has consumed me.