

LIVING THE LIFE OF EXCELLENCE

Texts: Psalm 34; I Samuel 2:26; Genesis 32:28; Daniel 6:3; Luke 1:3; I Corinthians 12:31.

In the Old Testament the word for excellence is “yattiy,” an Aramaic word meaning preeminent; when used as an adverb it means exceedingly. In Greek, the word for “excellence” is “kratistos” meaning the strongest, i.e. (in dignity) very honorable, noble.

As we examine the word “excellence” further, we see the Latin root is “excellentia” from the verb “excellere,” which means “surpass.” Excellence has been defined as a quality that surpasses ordinary standards.

If I were to ask you if you would like to live a life of excellence, I know the answer would be yes. Allow me to give you three challenges that would assure you a life of excellence.

I. BE GOOD.

Romans 3:12b says, “...there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” Have I asked you to do something you cannot do? Basically, I have indeed! But here’s the blessing: according to Romans 5:6-10, while we were yet without strength, even categorized as enemies, Christ died for us to reconcile us to God. When we accept the finished work of Christ, we are made just. Luke 23:50 gives us the definition of Joseph of Arimathea, “And, behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counsellor; and he was a good man, and a just.” Hence, a justified man is made by God’s grace a good man. We see Psalm 37:23 and Acts 11:24 speaks of a good man. Therefore, let us live up to God’s expectation for us.

Paul said in I Thessalonians 4:11, “And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.” Philippians 2:12a: “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence....”

With these two verses in mind, let me share with you three qualities of a good man or woman:

A. Cultivate profitable aloneness. “And that ye study to be quiet...”

1. Read voraciously-I Timothy 4:13: “...give attendance to reading....”

2. Pray fervently-James 5:16b: "...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

3. Contemplate frequently-Ecclesiastes 5:3b: "...a fool's voice is known by multitude of words." Ecclesiastes 10:14a: "A fool also is full of words...." Proverbs 29:20: "Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him." Ecclesiastes 5:2: "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." Rather than being one who gives a running commentary on life, learn to be still, observe and learn from other's blessings and shortcomings.

B. Work hard. "...do your own business, and to work with your own hands..."

A fellow golfer told the professional golfer Gary Player after he had made a most magnificent shot, "Gary, you must be the luckiest golfer I have ever seen." With that, Gary Player responded, "You know it is the funniest thing about luck; the harder I work, the luckier I get." Ecclesiastes 9:10a: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might...."

C. Be obedient to the unenforceable. "...Ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence..."

John Fletcher Moulton, first Baron, Minister of Munitions for Great Britain at the outbreak of World War I, a noted judge, a great Parliamentarian and administrator gave a remarkable speech shortly before his death entitled, "Law and Manners." In this great speech he introduces us to the domain entitled, "Obedience to the Unenforceable." Lord Mouton described this obedience as "...the obedience of a man to that which he cannot be forced to obey. He is the enforcer of the law upon himself." This is a person who does right in the dark.

II. BE HAPPY

In Psalm 1:1 where the Bible speaks of the "blessed" man and when Jesus speaks of "blessed" people in Matthew 5:8-11, both of the words in Hebrew and Greek are synonymous with happy. According to these passages of Scripture, God says the "blessed people" are (1) the godly; (2) poor in spirit (a person that doesn't pretend to have all the answers); (3) mourners (over sin); (4) meek (one who is in total submission to God); (5) the hungry and thirsty for righteousness (those who cannot be satisfied a mediocre existence); (6) merciful (those who live compassionately); (7) pure in heart (free from guile and willful sins of the heart); (8) peacemakers (those who look for reconciliation); (9) persecuted (those who suffer wrong for Jesus' sake).

III. BE READY

We need to be ready to die. Paul said in II Timothy 4:6, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.” We should be living in such a way that we are ready to go when God calls us. First of all, you need to be saved. If you are not saved, now is the time as II Corinthians 6:2 says, “(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)” Isaiah 1:18 tells us, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

We need to be ready for the Lord to return. The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 24:44, “Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” In the light of Christ’s return, we are admonished by the parable Jesus gave in Matthew 22 to invite others to join us in Heaven with Him. “Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage” (Matthew 22:4). In another parable Jesus taught in Luke 19:13, “And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.” The Greek word for “occupy” is, “pragmateuomai” which means to busy oneself with, i.e. to trade; to do business. As we consider the soon return of the Lord we, therefore, need to be ready to give an answer to anybody and everybody for what we believe. I Peter 3:15 says, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” The Greek word for “answer” is “apologia.” The word does not mean apologizing for something wrong. It means to speak up for what you know is right. It means to speak up for yourself. In legal terms it was defined as a clearing of self, a word for your defense. We need to know what we believe and we need to know why we believe what we believe. In this day of growing apostasy, we need, more than ever, to be ready for the answer of our faith.

Be good, be happy and be ready!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.