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THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

BY THOMAS WHITE

“ANYTHING DONE IN THE NAME OF CHRIST
SHOULD HAVE QUALITY STAMPED ALL OVER IT.”

PAUL DIXON



Since 1979, these words have set the standard for Cedarville University. But our motivation for pursuing quality and excellence in everything comes from a different source than other institutions of higher learning. Our motivation flows from our deep faith.

THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF GOD

The nature and character of God define and display excellence. Quality and excellence describe something good — like a commendable virtue or a well-made product. Excellence describes the nature and character of something. The very nature and character of God shows us what is good, perfect, holy, and excellent. We see this both through God’s creation and through God’s revealed Word to us.

In creation, we see the imprint of a thoughtful design. We all know that excellence and quality don’t happen by accident. As we admire creation, we see these qualities in a majestic sunset. We look up in the night sky to behold the countless

stars. We discover established natural laws set in place by the Creator, such as the orbit of the earth around the sun to create our seasons and the gravity that holds it all together. We study and admire the beauty of the monarch butterfly as it emerges transformed from its cocoon. We learn about the intricate details that allow a giraffe to drink water without passing out due to blood rushing to its brain, details that allow a bombardier beetle to create an explosion as a defense mechanism without destroying itself, and details that allow a woodpecker to create incredible force with every blow yet survive. The more we examine the human body, the more we learn of its complex DNA and immune system. God’s creation demonstrates excellence. By observing the quality of the creation, we learn something about the nature of the Creator.

God has revealed to us that while creation began good, mankind introduced sin to the world through the fall in

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Genesis 3. Ever since that time, God's Word tells us that all of creation groans for a renewal that is yet to come. The world we now observe contains the effects of sin through thorns, weeds, and mosquitoes. Despite the effects of the fall, we clearly see that God's work displays elements of His character, including excellence. As followers of Christ who desire to reflect the nature and character of God in our own lives, we must pursue excellence in all we do.

Think back to the building of the temple. God gave detailed instructions on how to build the temple. Scripture records the names of people with the ability to weave beautiful tapestries and sculpt precious metals. This construction created a visible shadow of the heavenly reality. God demanded that this place of worship demonstrate excellence in construction and in the rules of purification for worship. In doing so, God revealed to mankind something of



the heavens and of His own nature. God is excellence. Humanity is fallen, and we feel the temptation in our nature to cut corners, to cheat, to allow the

end to justify improper means, and to get away with whatever we can. This behavior reflects the nature of Satan, the father of lies who seeks to tear down and destroy. Yet, God Almighty stands alone as the good and excellent one.

For Christians desiring to become more like God, we cannot be satisfied with mediocracy. Good enough isn't good enough when living for Christ. We have a stewardship of the body, time, talents, and opportunities that God has given us. To reflect the character of our Creator, we must pursue excellence. Excellence and quality don't happen by accident. Excellence demands hard work, thorough thought, careful attention to detail, and relentless pursuit. Sometimes we don't achieve our goal, but through constant pursuit and through accepting nothing less than excellence in our effort, we demonstrate good stewardship pleasing to the One who

provided the opportunities. In doing the best we can in every situation, we serve God and our fellow man well.

The pursuit of reflecting God's character through excellence in everything can also create Gospel conversations.

Others may look at our work and wonder why we work so hard, pay attention to every detail, or strive for such a high standard. The question allows us to point back to life as a stewardship and not an ownership. We must give account for what we do, and the God whom we will stand before is a God of excellence. Our only hope is grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, but our reasonable

service to our God is excellence in all we do. Our God defines good. Our God personifies excellence. We seek excellence not for the applause of man but in service to our Savior.

THE ADMONITION OF SCRIPTURE

Scripture instructs followers of Christ to pursue excellence. Consider the following verses:

- Ecclesiastes 9:10: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going."
- 1 Corinthians 10:31: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."
- Colossians 3:23–24: "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ."

Scripture encourages us to work with might and excellence because we serve a Savior who sees all and knows all. This demands our best. This demands that we don't skip our reading just because we can get away with it or cut corners on that project because no one will ever notice. God sees, and He notices.

We see other examples of excellence in Scripture, such as Daniel. In academic matters of studying, Daniel and his friends demonstrated excellence. Daniel 1:20 states, "And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the

king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.” No doubt God gave them this ability, but these talents had to be accompanied by hard work to produce this level of excellence. This excellence served Daniel and his friends well as they served God in a foreign land. By similarly achieving a high academic level of understanding, a Christian university in the cornfields of Ohio can influence a nation that values intellectual ability. Daniel 6:3 continues, “Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him.” By pursuing excellence, we glorify God and encourage human flourishing.

THROUGH THE EMPOWERING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

At times, I find this demand overwhelming. Excellence in everything? That’s a daunting task, but we know that our pursuit of excellence comes through the power of the Spirit living within us. As we commit to this pursuit and embrace the hard work required, we humbly acknowledge that we cannot do this in our own strength, and we don’t do it for our own glory. The Spirit working through the Word of God must transform our lives to reflect the character of God. In doing so, we can learn to enjoy our work, to appreciate attention to detail, and to find happiness in serving others with excellence. Over time, the Spirit changes our nature from pursuing self to pursuing God, from loving self to loving others, from a prideful nature rebelling against our Creator to a humble servant seeking our Savior. Spiritual maturity replaces the crippling pressure with genuine joy as we pursue excellence in all things.

CEDARVILLE’S COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

For Cedarville, we believe in excellence so strongly that we put it in our mission statement and include it in our core values. Yet, our motivation like everything else on our campus flows from a biblical worldview.

The pursuit of excellence has motivated us to be bold and innovative. From being one of the first Christian universities in the country to wire for internet access across campus to now being the only private Christian university certified by the National Security Agency as a National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Operations, Cedarville continues to be a technology leader.

We hire faculty members who will maintain this high standard. We foster an environment of discipleship in student services that cares about students as image-bearers of God

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more than just numbers living in the residence halls. We have coaches who view athletes as brothers and sisters in Christ and not chess pieces to notch additional victories on a résumé.

PRESSING FORWARD

In all these things and so much more, we pursue excellence. We haven’t achieved our goal yet, and we never will — not in everything. But through relentless effort, we seek to reflect the character and nature of the God we serve. Every time we make a mistake, we learn from it, pick ourselves back up, and keep stumbling forward. As Paul writes in Philippians 3:13–14, “Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Cedarville presses on in pursuit of excellence while standing for the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus Christ.

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