**Sustained Excellence**

**Introduction**

1. Excellent:
   1. “extremely good; outstanding” (New Oxford American Dictionary)
   2. “very good of its kind” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)
2. Most can do something excellent once, twice, three times or a few more. However, what sets some apart from the rest is their sustained excellence.
   1. Sports
      1. A period of excellence – Jeremy Lin (2012 – New York Knicks PG – Harvard University – undrafted – “Linsanity” – stretch of excellent play – Now is an average player in the league)
      2. Sustained excellence – Lebron James (NBA Finals 8 yrs in a row), Dirk Nowitzki (21 yrs with Mavs – 6th all time pts scored in league), Tom Brady (6 rings, and still elite at age 41)
   2. Entertainment:
      1. One hit wonders – excellent once.
      2. Sustained excellence – The Beatles (Many hit songs, and best-selling albums.)
3. This is very similar to what God calls us to. He is not pleased with a few excellent spurts, but requires sustained excellence from us.
4. What does God consider excellence to be?
5. His Son
   1. God set His Son as the standard of excellence – **Matthew 3:13-17** – Jesus’ baptism by John.
      1. John’s baptism – ***“baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mark 1:4).***
      2. Jesus had no sin – so not baptized for that purpose.
      3. ***“to fulfill all righteousness”*** – i.e. submit to every ordinance of God:
         1. Validated John’s baptism – **cf. Matthew 21:25** – from heaven or men? – Heaven.
         2. An example to the people – **(v. 17)** – God was well pleased.
      4. Similar words at transfiguration – **Matthew 17:5** – added words, “Hear Him!”
         1. Jesus has authority – **Matthew 28:18**
         2. Jesus is the only way – **John 14:6**
         3. Following Jesus’ steps leads to life – **Mark 8:34**
   2. Jesus is excellent as the fulness of God – **Colossians 2:9-10** – we are complete/excellent in Him 🡪
6. His Adopted Children
   1. Excellent – “very good of its kind” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)
      1. Christians are the very best of human-kind by God’s design.
      2. **James 1:18** – firstfruits of His creatures – i.e. of the human race.
   2. **Revelation 14:3-5** – Christians are the ones who have been washed and redeemed, and who “follow the Lamb wherever He goes.”
   3. We are only excellent as we are in Christ – **Ephesians 1:3-6** – every spiritual blessing, holiness and blamelessness, IN HIM.
   4. The excellence in us is Jesus – **Galatians 2:20; 6:14-15** – Christ lives in us; new creation in Christ.
7. Essentially, excellence according to God is being Christ-like. However, being Christ-like for only a moment is not what God desires. He wants sustained Christ-likeness.
8. Temporary Excellence
9. Examples
   1. Hymenaeus and Alexander – **1 Timothy 1:18-20** – apparent teachers/preachers who had turned aside to error.
      1. Rejected faith and a good conscience – stopped listening to scripture, and started going against their conscience and doing that which was contrary to truth.
      2. Suffered shipwreck – implies a previous smooth sailing – i.e. previously taught truth.
      3. Delivered to Satan – discipline/withdrawal – were in Christ, but now in the realm where Satan rules.
      4. Started teaching blasphemous doctrine.
   2. Demas – **2 Timothy 4:10** – apparent previous companion of Paul who turned to worldly pleasure instead of continuing in faith.
      1. Was a companion of Paul’s in the gospel – **Colossians 4:14; Philemon 23-24**
      2. Forsaken Paul – similar to **verse 16** – ultimately didn’t stand with Paul in the gospel.
      3. Loved this present world – the things the world had to offer – immorality.
10. Temporary Excellence Is Not Enough
    1. Initially obeying the gospel and bearing fruit only to turn away – **Hebrews 6:4-8**
       1. **(vv. 4-5)** – tasted the graciousness of God in the gospel of forgiveness in Jesus.
       2. **(v. 6)** – rejected all God gave and you enjoyed for something lesser – showed disdain for Christ like in crucifixion.
       3. **(vv. 7-8**) – Like some plants, rain was absorbed, and fruit brought forth, but then they started bearing thorns and briers – to be rejected.
       4. **Cf. Matthew 13:20-22** – temporary excellence of the progress of the seed.
    2. The picture of temporary spiritual excellence, and a return to being like everyone else – **2 Peter 2:20-22** – like a dog and a hog.
11. Sustained Excellence
12. Anyone can be faithful for a small stretch of time. Sustained faithfulness is what separates the sheep from the goats. Great men of faith are recorded as sustaining their excellence of walking with God.
13. Examples
    1. Enoch – **Hebrews 11:5** – taken by God because he pleased Him.
       1. **Genesis 5:21-24** – brief account of Enoch’s life.
          1. **(vv. 21-22)** – did not always walk with God – started when he was 65.
          2. **(vv. 22-23)** – did not walk with God for a little bit, but the rest of his life – 300 yrs.
          3. **(v. 24)** – Was so pleasing to God that God exempted him from a normal end of life – death.
    2. Noah – **Hebrews 11:7** – built an ark (which took a long time), and condemned the world by doing so in obedience to God.
       1. **Genesis 6:7-9** – why Noah was used by God – walked with God, and was a man of righteousness.
       2. Did not stop there – CONTINUED CONSISTENTLY IN RIGHTEOUSNESS BY DOING WHAT GOD TOLD HIM.
       3. EVEN MORE SO – **2 Peter 2:5** – not only built an ark, but preached during the whole time to an obstinate people. (**cf. Genesis 6:3** – 120 yrs)
14. God Calls Us to a Life of Sustained Excellence – Faithfulness
    1. Paul’s end – **2 Timothy 4:6-8** – he had lived his entire post-conversion life faithfully.
       1. **(v. 8)** – He uses his own life as an example for all of us. (much like his conversion **– 1 Timothy 1:16** – used as a pattern)
       2. **(v. 6)** – drink offering – whole life as a sacrifice, and this is the final bit.
       3. **(v. 7)** – spoken of as entire, i.e. completed. (FINISHED RACE)
          1. Paul kept what God committed to him – the gospel.
          2. God was able to keep what Paul committed to Him – **2 Timothy 1:12** – His life.
       4. **(v. 8)** – love His appearing – look forward to His coming to reward us. 🡪
    2. **2 Peter 3:14-18** – we are to be faithful for our entire lives until His coming, NOT FALLING FROM OUR STEADFASTNESS.
       1. His longsuffering is for us to continue in growth toward Him, and make sure our lives are right at His coming.
       2. **(v. 18)** – We CONTINUE to grow until that day.
    3. **1 Corinthians 9:24-27** – we run in such a way to obtain the prize.
       1. Runners have to run the full length of the race.
       2. Not temporary excellence – a good first mile – but sustained excellence – overall time and place.
       3. **(v. 27)** – Paul could have become disqualified – i.e. if his faithfulness/excellence was not sustained.

**Conclusion**

1. It is very easy for us to obey the gospel, and be faithful for a little while.
2. Those who are faithful for a little while are not going to be in heaven – ONLY THOSE WHO ARE FAITHFUL FOR THEIR ENTIRE LIVES WILL BE WITH THE LORD.
3. Does “Sustained Excellence” describe you spiritually?