

BECOMING
A *W*OMAN
OF *excellence*



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CYNTHIA HEALD

BECOMING
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OF *excellence*



NAV PRESS®

BRINGING TRUTH TO LIFE

THE QUARRY

His thoughts said, The time of preparation for service is longer than I had imagined it would be, and this kind of preparation is difficult to understand.

His Father said, “Think of the quarry whence came the stone for My house in Jerusalem.”

THE TOOLS

His thoughts said, I wonder why these special tools are used?

His Father said, “The house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither; so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.

“If thou knewest the disappointment it is to the builders when the stone cannot be used for the house, because it was not made ready before it was brought thither, if thou knewest My purpose for thee, thou wouldest welcome any tool if only it prepared thee quietly and perfectly to fit into thy place in the house.”

—AMY CARMICHAEL

My prayer is that this study will be a tool to prepare each of us to fit perfectly into His Kingdom.

—CYNTHIA HEALD

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SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS STUDY

Becoming a Woman of Excellence is suitable for group or individual study and for women of all ages, either married or single.

You'll notice personal reflections from the author in each chapter. Use these thoughts to prompt your examination and application of the study to your own life.

Most of the questions direct you into the Bible to help you formulate your answer based on the Word of God. Let the Scriptures speak to you personally; there is not always a right or wrong answer.

A verse for Scripture memory is given under the title of each chapter. You may memorize the verse before or after doing the chapter study, in any translation you choose.

A dictionary and any Bible references or commentaries can be good resources for you in answering questions. You'll also find them helpful in any further Bible study you might do on your own.

PREFACE

*W*hile reading through the book of Ruth, I was struck with Boaz's praise of Ruth: "Now my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you whatever you ask, for all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence" (Ruth 3:11).

My immediate response to this passage was to ask, What made Ruth a woman of excellence? As I studied her life, I discovered qualities within her that spoke strongly of strength and excellence. In prayer and further Bible study I learned that if we give priority attention to developing and maintaining ourselves inwardly as God desires, then our responses and actions will follow accordingly. Proverbs 4:23 says it well: "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life." This study leads us into a discovery of how God's Word applies to our inner lives to challenge our commitment to excellence, to deepen our communion with God, and to prepare our hearts to proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (see 1 Peter 2:9).

As a result of my personal study, whenever I am confronted with choices or decisions of all kinds, I find myself asking the question, "What would a woman of excellence do?" May this be your question, too, as we become women of excellence for the honor and glory of God.

PART ONE

THE
GOAL



CHAPTER ONE

excellence
A GOAL WORTH PURSUING



So that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ.

PHILIPPIANS 1:10

*B*efore studying the book of Ruth, whenever I heard the word *excellence* associated with another person, I usually thought that they were probably perfect, that they were high achievers, and that their lives were generally good. So I was taken by surprise when I read Ruth's kinsman, Boaz, respond to her by saying: "all my people in the city know that you are a woman of excellence" (Ruth 3:11). I was surprised because Ruth's life did not illustrate my understanding of excellence. Her husband had died; she had left her own family, country, and future to move to a foreign country and live with an unhappy mother-in-law. Her work was foraging for leftover grain in a field. Yet, apparently, as she went about this lowly task, those who knew her said, "Oh, Ruth, she has noble character, she is strong, she is worthy."

In our world, beauty, ability in the marketplace, and independence are major issues for women who search for meaning and excellence in


their lives. We are under pressure to choose the right clothes, the latest décor, and the most fashionable jewelry in order to establish our value as individuals. In our comparison shopping for material things, we often end up comparing ourselves with society's models of success and feel that no one would ever say to us, "I want to tell you that all my friends know you are a woman of excellence."


The Search for Excellence

1. What words or thoughts would you use to define *excellence*?

2. In today's world, how is excellence defined?

3. It is fairly easy to sense the world's view of excellence, but how would you describe or define the church's concept of excellence?

 The church is in almost as much trouble as the culture, for the church has bought into the same value system: fame, success, materialism, and celebrity. We watch the leading churches and the leading Christians for our cues.¹

Charles Colson 

A Biblical View of Excellence

The Greek word translated “excellent” in the New Testament comes from *diapherō*, which literally means “transport” or “differ.” In addition to “excellent,” Scripture translations also use “best,” “vital,” “the better things,” or “the highest and best.”

The Hebrew word translated “excel” in Proverbs 31:29 is *alah*, which means “to ascend.”

Both these words are used to encourage us to ascend or transport or carry above the norm—to differ through the qualities of virtue and goodness.

Webster’s dictionary defines *excel* as “to be superior or preeminent in good qualities or praiseworthy actions.” *Excellence* is “the possession chiefly of good qualities in an unusual degree; surpassing virtue, merit, worth, value.”

-
4. Three Scripture passages apply the concept of excellence to women. For each one, write down the qualities mentioned. (If your version doesn’t use the actual term “excellent,” write the equivalent phrase alongside your answer.)

Ruth 3:11

Proverbs 12:4

Proverbs 31:10

The *Amplified Version* of the Bible seeks to give full meaning to key words in the original texts by suggesting a number of possible synonyms for a given word. Here is how this version renders the verses listed above:

Ruth 3:11 — “a woman of strength — worth, bravery, capability”

Proverbs 12:4 — “a virtuous and worthy wife — earnest and strong in character”

Proverbs 31:10 — “a capable, intelligent and virtuous woman”

-
5. Look up the following verses to see what they teach about our pursuit of the “highest and best.” For each reference, write down one specific thought that should affect how or why we strive for excellence.

1 Corinthians 10:31

Philippians 1:9-10

Philippians 4:8

6. If the goal of our pursuit is not clear, we risk losing sight of what it is we're striving for. The following Scripture passages give us specific guidelines for how we should pursue growth in our walk with God. What does each passage tell us to do?

Matthew 22:36-39

Romans 12:2

Colossians 1:9-10

2 Timothy 2:15

-
7. From the verses you've studied so far, how would you explain the biblical view of excellence to a friend?

A Personal Goal of Excellence

AUTHOR'S REFLECTION—As a young girl I remember my mother telling me many times, “If you are going to do anything, do it right!” This admonition was applied to setting the table, ironing a dress, or washing the dishes. My mom did not expect perfection, but her thought was that if I were to undertake a task, then I should do it to the best of my ability. I didn’t realize it then, but early in my life I was being taught the value of doing things well.

When I reached my fortieth birthday, I realized that my life was probably half over! As I considered my past, I remembered my acceptance of Christ, college graduation, marriage, teaching English, several moves, and cooking, cleaning, and carpooling for four children. I felt that I was right where I needed to be, but somewhere over the years I had settled for a goal of mediocrity. I could identify with the secretary who had this sign over her desk: “Today I think I’ll try to accomplish something . . . like getting through it!” At this stage in my life, I wanted to be sure that I was open to embrace all that God might have for me in my remaining years.

As I read through the Scriptures that year with this new perspective, I was able to see for the first time Boaz’s comment to Ruth about her excellence. I immediately realized that she trusted God with her life and she did not allow her circumstances to dictate her behavior or responses. As I contemplated the qualities she had that made her a woman of noble character, I silently prayed, “Lord, I don’t know how many years I have left to live, but I don’t want to miss out on anything You have for me. For the rest of my life I want to be in the process of becoming a woman of excellence, a woman of noble character, for Your glory.”

8. Take a few minutes and reflect on your life. Write down the ways you were encouraged to excel in life. Were these ways more help or hindrance to your understanding of excellence?

9. From each of these Scripture passages, select one important truth you need to grasp in order to have God's best for your life.

Philippians 3:12-14


Hebrews 6:1

Throughout our study we will be exploring not only God's call to excellence, but His provision, patience, and assurance that His power is perfected in weakness. From the beginning we need to realize that excellence is not perfection, but essentially a desire to be strong *in* the Lord and *for* the Lord. As Oswald Chambers wrote: "Do we so appreciate the marvelous salvation of Jesus Christ that we are our utmost for His highest?"²

10. Review any insights from this chapter that were especially meaningful to you in learning to become a woman of excellence. After thinking over the Scriptures you've studied, write down a goal you'd like to set for yourself in doing this study (for example, a possible goal might be, "To understand how I can become a woman of excellence"). Establishing a goal will help remind you of your purpose and commitment as you work through the study.

A Heart for God's Word

Scripture memory enables us to keep our goals in mind and open our hearts to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. David wrote, "I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8). Having God's Word in our hearts is great motivation to obey and to grow.

 I know of no other single practice in the Christian life more rewarding, practically speaking, than memorizing Scripture. That's right. No other single discipline is more useful and rewarding than this. No other single exercise pays greater spiritual dividends! Your prayer life will be strengthened. Your attitudes and outlook will begin to change. Your mind will become alert and observant. Your confidence and assurance will be enhanced. Your faith will be solidified.³

Charles R. Swindoll



SUGGESTED SCRIPTURE MEMORY: Philippians 1:9-10

Notes

1. Charles Colson, *Loving God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 14.
2. Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1966), July 7.
3. Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* (Portland: Multnomah, 1983), 53.