

eXcellent

The Scripture:

But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:31).

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things (Philippians 4:8).

The thought:

While ever-present materialism may continually push us toward “more” things, “more” activities, and “more” busyness, we need to be focused on the “most excellent.” Notice that the “be focused” is in the passive voice. This concentration is not something we can do easily on our own but something that comes from knowing Jesus. Sometimes we give attention to the gifts which come from Jesus when we need to remember the “more excellent way” which Saint Paul goes on to describe in I Corinthians 13 — the way of love. Instead of settling for things and talents, Jesus wants us to turn to him and his way of love. As Paul also describes it, this more excellent way is a way of truth, nobility, rightness, and purity. These characteristics of the more excellent way sound much like the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22).

The fruit of the Spirit is indeed love! The more we know Jesus, the more we can demonstrate the fruit of his Spirit.

The song:

*More about Jesus would I know,
More of His grace to others show;
More of His saving fullness see,
More of His love Who died for me.*

*More, more about Jesus,
More, more about Jesus;
More of His saving fullness see,
More of His love Who died for me.*

*More about Jesus let me learn,
More of His holy will discern;
Spirit of God, my teacher be,
Showing the things of Christ to me.*

--Eliza E. Hewitt (1887)

The question:

Am I striving toward excellence in my walk with Jesus? How is God's love demonstrated through me to others?

The experience:

Excellence sounds a lot like perfection. But to be excellent is not necessarily to be perfect. Striving toward excellence has to do with moving toward the goal of perfection. We can be made perfect in love but in practice we will be limited by human frailty.

One of my great challenges was learning to write neatly. My mother won a prize in primary school for excellence in handwriting. I just did not inherit her careful ability. Part of the challenge for me, I suppose, was the fact that I had to learn to write with a dipper pen. My pen had a nib and had to be dipped in an inkwell regularly to get the ink needed. Often the nib scratched on the paper—there was a jerk and a resultant blot of ink. My mother suggested that, as she had done, I make flowers out of my ink blots. Regretfully, I was just not artistic enough to make this work. Yet, what a joy it is when we can turn life's inkblots into beautiful flowers. This thought reminds me of the line from a song: "Your roses may have thorns, but don't forget your thorns may have some roses, too" (Haldor Lillenas).

I have always felt the need to do my best in my daily commitments and I think in many areas I have done so. But I guess I have always been in a hurry with handwriting. The development of word processing has been a great blessing. Now I can edit to my heart's content with the tedious requirement of retyping pages of text.

It would seem then that a big part of excellence is effort and faithfulness over time.