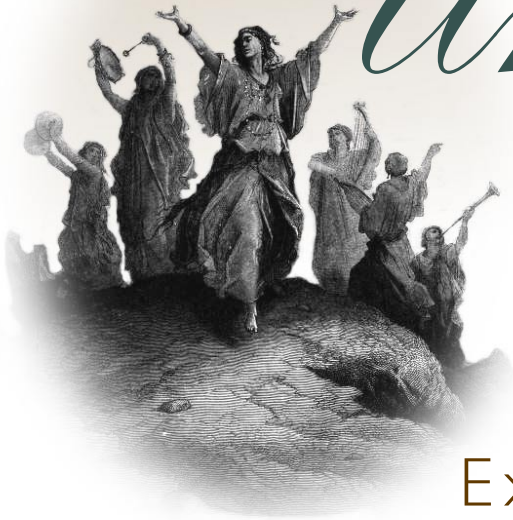


In Unison



The trumpeters and
singers joined in unison,
as with one voice, to
give praise and thanks
to the Lord.
2 Chronicles 5:13

Excellence: For the Prize

small medallion worn about the neck. Years of labor and pain dedicated to the possible reward of a small metal disk. One misstep at the wrong moment, and even that is denied.

Are we not filled with wonder and amazement during the Olympic Games. Do we not marvel at the human beings who have committed themselves to perfecting their athletic skills with such exquisite elegance and grace.

To accomplish their feats, these athletes train for years—passionately, energetically. They work hour after hour, week after week, practicing, constantly working, constantly improving, polishing their skills until perfection is reached—and when perfection is reached, they practice still more.

And why? What is their reward for all the devotion to one, specific craft? A

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. 1 Corinthians 9:25

We applaud the athlete who dedicates him or herself to excellence—as well we should. But why do we not honor this same dedication to excellence when it comes to serving and worshiping our God? If we admire this trait in athletes who pursue physical excellence for a medallion, why do we not pursue this same excellence as we serve our God for His eternal reward?

Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

1 Corinthians 9:26-27

Insidious Mediocrity

Why are we so casual with the things of God? Why do we work harder at our golf game than we do at being a deacon or usher? Why do we spend more time sitting in front of the TV than we do kneeling in prayer? Why do we place soccer and Little League before choir practice? Why is the demonstration of our faith so mediocre when, for us, Jesus Christ gave His very best?

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 1 Corinthians 9:24

Our “prize” will not be found in gold or silver or bronze, but in the gracious approval of a loving, gracious God. We rise into His arms bearing the bronze of the angels’ applause, the silver of a job well-done, and the gold of eternal life.

“

A life which soars is one that doesn't get caught in the trap of the temporal. People of excellence are those that see through the clutching greed of our times—people who have declared their undivided allegiance to Christ's message, a message that praises and exalts and honors the King of heaven, knowing He is able to humble those who walk in pride. Such a commitment represents authentic excellence, leaving no excuse for mediocrity. People who God intended—are humbled themselves to authority. They are citi-ible kingdom.” (Charles R. Swindoll, *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity*, WORD, 1987)



“

It's possible to be a follower of Jesus without being a disciple; to be a camp-follower without being a soldier of the king; to be a hanger-on in some great work without pulling one's weight. Once someone was talking to a great scholar about a younger man. He said, 'So and so tells me that he was one of your students.' The teacher answered devastatingly, 'He may have attended my lectures, but he was not one of my students.'
“There is a world of difference between attending lectures and being a student. It is one of the supreme handicaps of the Church that in the Church there are so many distant followers of Jesus and so few real disciples.” (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke, The Daily Study Bible*)

*For our world of need and anguish we would lift to Thee our prayer.
Faithful stewards of Thy bounty, may we with our brothers share.
In the name of Christ our Savior, who redeems and sets us free,
Gifts we bring of heart and treasure, that our lives may worthier be.
Ruth Elliot*



Scripture

"Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River; or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Joshua 24:14-15

See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. Isaiah 40:10-11

For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done. Matthew 16:27
"Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets." Luke 6:23

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Romans 12:1

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. Romans 12:6-8

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. I Corinthians 6:19-20

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter: He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the plea-

tures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. Hebrews 11:24-26

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire." Hebrews 12:28-29

"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." Revelation 2:10

"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done." Revelation 22:12

Hymns and Choruses

Master, No Offering (Parker)
Master, no offering, costly and sweet,
May we, Like Magdalene, lay at Thy feet;
Yet may love's incense rise, sweeter than sacrifice,
Dear Lord, to Thee, dear Lord to Thee.

O Lord of Heaven and Earth and Sea (Wordsworth)
O Lord of heav'n and earth and Sea,
To Thee all praise and glory be;
How shall we show our love to Thee,
Who givest all?

Our Best (Kirk)
Every work for Jesus will be blest,
But He asks from everyone His best,
Our talents may be few,
These may be small,
But unto Him is due
Our best, our all.

I Will serve Thee (Gaither)
I will serve Thee because I love Thee,
You have given life to me;
I was nothing before You found me,
You have given life to me.

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