

What About ... Pursuing Excellence?

By Dr. Jerry A. Collins

The goal of all ministry is the spiritual maturity of believers (Colossians 1:28). Spiritual maturity is that process of full development into the image of Jesus Christ which is reached through continual growth. That development forms the preparation for our evaluation by Christ that impacts our eternal situation in heaven (1 Corinthians 3:12-14; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10). If the purpose of ministry is the spiritual maturity of believers, then the outcome would be biblical Patriarchs and Matriarchs.

Here is a general path or pattern one traverses in his or her spiritual growth toward its ultimate destination:

Chaos ⇒ Order ⇒ Maturity ⇒ Patriarch/Matriarch ⇒ Virtuous Excellence ⇒ Reigning in Eternity

It's generally true that as believers progress in their spiritual growth, their life moves along a continuum of that growth. The further along they progress, the greater the development of their spiritual character. Ultimately, the believer is preparing for eternity by transitioning through these realms of spiritual growth toward the prospect of reigning with Christ in the affairs of His eternal kingdom administration (Luke 19:11-27; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 3:20-22). Discipleship enables as many as are willing, to traverse this path as far as possible in their lifetime. As they do, they potentially become biblical Patriarchs and Matriarchs.

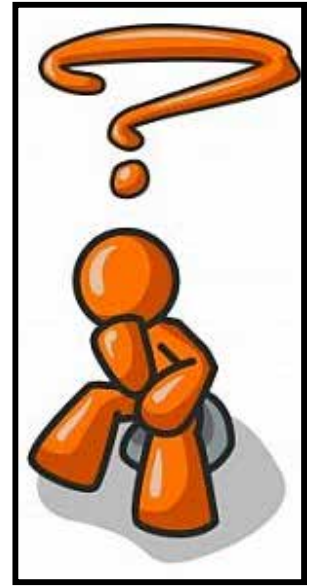
So if the goal of ministry is spiritual maturity and the ultimate outcome of spiritual maturity is becoming a biblical Patriarch or Matriarch, then an important component of that growth is biblical virtuous excellence. Excellence is that quality which is outstanding, that surpasses ordinary standards. Virtuous excellence is that quality of moral character which surpasses ordinary standards consistent with spiritual maturity. Patriarchs and Matriarchs have cultivated the spiritual virtues of the inner person.

Virtuous Excellence in the Bible

The concept of excellent virtue is expressed in both the Old and New Testaments. In Ruth 3:11, Boaz acknowledged that the elders and *all my people in the city know that you [Ruth] are a woman of excellence*. The word that translates as one of noble character, valor, worth and ability. Proverbs 12:4 and 31:10 describe the excellent wife who is *the crown of her husband* and whose *worth is far above jewels*. She is of noble character, signifying possession of all the virtue, honor, and strength essential to surpass ordinary standards as a wife. Proverbs 17:7 refers to *excellent speech* [that is] *not fitting for a fool*. There is a category of speech that qualifies as excellent. Noble speech that is appropriate for the situation is admirable, though not possible, for a fool.

Jesus is also associated with excellence. In Hebrews 1:4, we read, *having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they*. In verses 5-14, the author lists seven ways that Christ has inherited a more outstanding renown than the angels (begotten of God, worshipped by angels, has a throne and kingdom, anointed above, Creator, at God's right hand, accomplished salvation—angels have none of these). In Hebrews 8:6, it says, *but now He has obtained a more excellent ministry...He is also the mediator of a better covenant...enacted on better promises*. Jesus' ministry is more outstanding than the Levitical priests (vv. 1-5) because theirs was merely a shadow of Jesus' actual ministry. His new priestly service is more excellent (outstanding) and better (v. 13).

In 1 Corinthians 12:31, it says, *but earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way*. That quality of life is described as excellent, of extraordinary degree or a far better way. This *more excellent way*, which is the manner of life that is of higher quality than spiritual gifts, was the way of love or **loving excellence**. Spiritual patriarchs and matriarchs have developed this more excellent way of loving and offering that to all of those around them, especially cognizant of its impact upon those within their extended relational



network. A chaotic boy/girl chooses to focus on himself/herself. An ordered husband/wife focuses on his or her spouse. A mature Patriarch/Matriarch focuses on loving God.

Philippians 4:8 speaks of the concept of **thinking excellence**.

*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is worthy of good repute, if there is any **excellence** and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind **dwell on these things**.*

The list includes things that are true, worthy of respect, conformity to God's standard, dignified, undefiled, and of an upright reputation. These thoughts and this thinking is exemplary and then described as one of *excellence* and *praiseworthy*. Paul commanded the Philippians to let your mind dwell on these things, that is, to calculate and cultivate these six qualities of thought.

It is not merely thinking the best of others but utilizing these thought virtues as a prism to evaluate reality. This promotes integrity, honesty, and truthfulness, while avoiding being duplicitous or showing favoritism. A chaotic boy/girl avoids wholesome reasoning. An ordered man/woman establishes honorable thought. A mature Patriarch/Matriarch employs edifying acumen which surrounds one's relational network with honesty and truthfulness.

The Apostle Peter addressed the concept of **moral excellence** in 2 Peter 1:4-7. He wrote:

*For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now for this very reason also, **applying all diligence**, in your faith **supply moral excellence**, and in moral excellence, knowledge...self control...perseverance...godliness...brotherly kindness ... godly love.*

Because of our salvation, believers *having escaped the corruption that is in the world by* [means of] *lust* can live a godly life which requires *applying all diligence*. God has provided salvation and now *in your faith supply*, i.e., supply things to our faith (v. 5). This supplying involves bringing in alongside our faith a complement of virtue. Bring alongside our faith **moral excellence**, which is part of the symphony of virtue that includes understanding, self-mastery, endurance, piety, friendship, and godly love (vv. 5-7). A chaotic boy/girl ignores moral excellence. An ordered man/woman establishes moral excellence. A mature Patriarch/Matriarch applies all diligence to moral excellence.

Observations about Virtuous Excellence

- A Patriarch/Matriarch pursues **loving excellence**, that is, **love** which is outstanding, that surpasses ordinary standards. One starts with the *concept of love* from Scripture, then earnestly desires the *virtue of love* in 1 Corinthians 13. The dynamics of godly love dominate a Patriarch/Matriarch who then extends that giving love out into his/her enlarged relational realm as a natural expression of one's character. A Patriarch/Matriarch *earnestly desires* loving excellence.
- A Patriarch/Matriarch pursues **thinking excellence**, that is, **thoughts** which are outstanding, that surpass ordinary standards. They linger upon and occupy their inner thought life with virtuous and wholesome thinking that builds up, encourages, enhances, and brings honor. A Patriarch/Matriarch *lets* [his/her] *mind dwell on these things* that characterize thinking excellence.
- A Patriarch/Matriarch pursues **moral excellence**, that is, **character** which is outstanding that surpasses ordinary standards. They apply all due diligence to the matter of developing inner spiritual character with godly virtue that becomes the actual expression of the moral nature of God within them. This moral character becomes the basis of pleasing God and finishing well. A Patriarch/Matriarch applies *all diligence* to moral excellence.