

Do Things Well

By

Warren Berkley and David Banning

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DO THINGS WELL
by Warren Berkley and David Banning

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Spiritual “equipment” for the contest of life.



RECOMMENDATION

Paul Earnhart

In an age when novelty masquerades as spirituality and change for change's sake has more influence on God's people than the Scripture it is indeed refreshing to find a book that is concerned that churches evaluate the way they do things in light of the divine will and make changes that are biblically driven. Our task in the words of the old American Standard Version is to "show forth the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). *Do Things Well* is a book that in practical as well as biblical terms calls on us to do exactly that.

RECOMMENDATION

Sewell Hall

When faith is strong our invisible God looms large, but as faith weakens we tend to become less aware of Him. In our increasingly faithless society, believers need constant reminders that our goal in worship and work is to do the will of God for the glory of God. This theme runs throughout the book, *Doing Things Well*, and makes its publication especially timely. The best service we can render to our transcendent God is flawed enough without the casual approach that is becoming all too common. I recommend this book especially to elders and deacons and would encourage every man who serves in any capacity to read it. It would make an excellent study for a men's class.

DEDICATED TO

Adam Smelser

We never met Adam Smelser. But after his tragic death, we followed with fascination the countless social media posts about his life. His friends describe a young man who loved God, who loved God's people and who inspired others to do the same. Although his years were few, they mattered. He made a difference. For that reason, we are happy to dedicate this book to Adam.



Photo Credit, Florida College

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Chapter 1

The Pursuit of Excellence

Max Dawson

It is an addiction and a curse. It is a curse that prevents churches from reaching their potential for God. The curse hinders churches from converting souls to Jesus. It is an addiction that does not want to be broken. The addiction resists reform and argues that it must maintain old habits and methods. It is an addiction and curse that dishonors God and withholds from Him the glory due His excellent name.

The addiction and curse is called “mediocrity.” It stands diametrically opposed to everything God is and to everything God calls us to do. It means settling for less than our best. It is happy with half-hearted efforts and results. It is a disgrace to the God we serve.

While some brethren may settle for “good enough,” where would we go in Scripture to find that “good enough” pleases God? Search the 66 books and you will find that God was never happy when His people settled for mediocrity in serving Him. It is time that we restored the spirit of excellence that characterized so many of God’s faithful servants in Bible days!

What is the Purpose of Our Existence?

We might be tempted to answer that question from Ecclesiastes 12:13, that we must “Fear God and keep His commandments.” While that is our duty, it is not our purpose in life. Our ultimate purpose and the reason we keep His word is to give Him glory. The most critical thing to God is that He be glorified.

Read Psalm 79:8–9. Here, Israel appeals to God for deliverance from their enemy. The appeal, however, is not for the sake of Israel, but

“for the glory of Your name ... for Your name’s sake.” The nation of Israel existed for the very purpose of giving God glory. (See Isaiah 43:6–7 and Ezekiel 36:22–23.) All that God did through Israel, and for Israel, was for the purpose of achieving His own glory.

In like manner, the New Testament church exists to glorify God. Read Ephesians 3:20–21. Our reliance on God and His power is not for our benefit only. It is to give Him glory in the church. It is God who is at the center of all that we do; it is not ourselves!

We absolutely, positively must pursue excellence.

Whether we view Christians as a collectivity, working together in the local church, or whether we look at our individual actions as disciples of Jesus, our purpose is to give glory to God. It is as 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

Serving God with a spirit of mediocrity does not achieve the purpose of our existence. We exist for His glory. We fit in God’s plan in that we are allowed the privilege of glorifying His name.

Who is This God That We Serve?

We know well the story of King Solomon and his building of God’s temple. The preparation was begun by King David; Solomon continued the preparation and did the building. In 2 Chronicles 2 he assigned more than 150,000 men to the work. He sent letters to other kings asking their assistance in finding the finest craftsmen to help build the great edifice.

Reading 2 Chronicles 2:5, we hear Solomon’s powerful proclamation, “The house which I am about to build will be great, for greater is our God than all the gods.” The king was determined to do a great work because of the greatness of God. The excellent God deserved an excellent effort! Later in the chapter Solomon recognizes that

even his best and finest work cannot truly do justice to the magnificence of God, yet that will not prevent him from giving his best. In 2 Chronicles 2:9 he said, “... the house which I am about to build will be great and wonderful.”

The greatness of the temple was not to Solomon’s glory, but to the glory of the excellent God he served. The Lord of heaven and earth was worthy of nothing less than Solomon’s highest and utmost effort. An extreme effort for the excellent God!

Solomon knew who God was. Do we? How can we possibly be satisfied with less than our best when it comes to preaching, Bible classes, song worship, or even how we maintain our place of worship? We absolutely, positively must pursue excellence.

What If We Give God Less Than Our Best?

We don’t have to look far to get an answer to that question. The prophet Malachi teaches us a valuable lesson about excellence—or the lack of it! In the last book of the Old Testament God announced His absolute displeasure with His own people. He called upon them to repent; judgment was coming on a careless and disobedient people. Their worship had degenerated into a malaise and malady that treated God in a way in which they would never treat any other person of honor. Instead of giving God their best, they had become accustomed to giving God the equivalent of junk!

How would you feel if, on your birthday, someone who supposedly loved you gave you a piece of junk as a gift? Maybe you are a golfer. Your friend gives you a broken nine iron. “After all,” he says, “it was of no value to me. I was going to throw it out anyway.” Giving you a throw away? How does that show love or respect for you?

The people of Malachi’s time brought to God the blind, injured, or diseased lamb as an offering. “After all,” they might have said, “it was

of no value to me.” They should have been giving God the animal that would win the blue ribbon at the state fair—the one that was of most value. Instead, they gave what was of no value. God deserved better.

He deserves better today. If we offer our God cheap, halfhearted efforts when it comes to worship and service, He will be no more pleased with us than with those in Malachi’s time.

“Oh,” but we say, “it’s for God. And He doesn’t require that we reach some high standard.” The correct understanding is that God requires a high effort. While we may never reach perfection in all that we do, that doesn’t mean we settle for mediocre efforts. It is an inexcusable situation if we find brethren meeting in dirty church buildings with smelly restrooms. It is a disgrace to God if the community drives past our buildings and sees grass that should have been cut two weeks ago. Do we maintain our own houses and lawns the way we maintain our worship facilities?

Brethren have said, “We don’t want to try to impress the public with how our buildings and landscaping look. We want to draw folks with the gospel.” The problem is, when a building is unkempt, you will keep folks away before they ever have a chance to hear the gospel! Some kind of impression—good or bad—is made by how you maintain your facility. Show the public that worship of God matters to you by keeping the worship facility looking clean and neat!

What is true of the facility is true of worship in the facility. Carelessness and mediocre efforts don’t cut it. Shoddily prepared sermons don’t attract people to Jesus. Poor efforts at song leading don’t impress anyone with how much you are devoted to God. Poorly prepared Bible class teachers and low quality material do not draw people to Christ. If people are converted under these circumstances, it is in spite of such efforts, not because of them!

Returning to Malachi, we are impressed with God’s displeasure with His own people. In Malachi 1:6, God questions the Jews, “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?” Because of their carelessness and lack of devotion, God accused them of despising His name! God tells them, “Don’t bring Me your junk.” No one would make such offerings to a government dignitary. Why make such an offering to God?

To show how repugnant such offerings were, God said, “Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar! I am not pleased with you,” says the Lord of hosts, “nor will I accept an offering from you” (Malachi 1:10). He said it would be better for the doors to be closed than for such worship to continue. Have we ever thought that our worship might be so careless that it would be better to close the doors to our buildings?

“Good enough” is not good enough when it comes to glorifying God. Excellence honors God. Anything less does not.

What Effect Does Excellence Have on People?

When Solomon built the temple he wanted others to see that God deserved the best. When the Queen of Sheba came to Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 9) one of the things she saw was the magnificent house of God Solomon built. She was awestruck. She saw something of God’s greatness and excellence when she saw the splendid edifice.

In our efforts to serve God, people should see something of God’s greatness and excellence. When we value excellence, as Solomon did, it says something to the public about the kind of God we worship. It says that He really means something to us and nothing is too good for Him. It tells folks that we are truly dedicated to the Lord Jesus and that He is worthy of the finest effort we can muster.

The pursuit of excellence in God's service tells non-Christians that we value our God. Below is a simple list of 25 things that communicate a message to the public. This message may determine whether they will ever listen to the gospel. All will be addressed in more detail in this book. While we have the message of salvation (Romans 1:16), what we say by how we do things may be so loud that the public will never hear the word of salvation. To express it another way, the public may say to us, "What you are shouting by the appearance of your church building and how you do things is so loud that we can't hear the message about Jesus." This list will help send the right message. More could be added, but these are things we need to be aware of and do well! Here is what we want people to see and hear when they take a look at us.

- A neatly kept building when they pass by.
- A sign that can be easily read from the street.
- A well maintained lawn and parking lot.
- Someone greeting them as they enter the building.
- A visitor's packet that welcomes them and gives relevant information.
- Someone helping them find a seat in the auditorium or class.
- Services that begin on time (with the members present on time).
- In Bible class, a teacher who is well prepared and visitor conscious.
- In the assembly, a service that begins with scripture and a focus on worship; that welcomes guests and communicates our focus on spiritual things.
- A song service where the leader is well trained and well prepared.

- A song service where the leader and members all know the songs.
- A song service where all the members participate in singing.
- Scripture reading that is well prepared and read with precision and passion.
- Meaningful prayers that are clearly spoken into a microphone so all can hear.
- The Lord’s Supper conducted in a way that is relevant and reverent.
- Preaching that is well prepared and well delivered.
- An audience that listens carefully to preaching and turns to passages being considered.
- Audio aids and visual aids that help the visitor learn.
- An invitation that appeals to the hearts of men to follow God.
- Brief closing remarks that emphasize church family and urge visitors to return.
- A dismissal prayer that is a dismissal prayer.
- Christians who greet guests and give them special attention.
- Special events that are carefully planned and executed well.
- Advertising that is professionally prepared and that compliments well the great message we are trying to share.
- People who are doing their very best to honor and glorify the great God we serve.

I hope you see value in these things. It is a tragedy that some brethren just don't get it. They seem to think that they can offer just about anything to God and He will be glad to get it. God was not pleased with that bunch in Malachi's time when they had that kind of attitude; neither will He be pleased with us. You can take everything in this list and turn it around. What if people drive up to a building where the grass always needs cutting? What if they can't read the sign because it is weathered or broken? What if they walk into a building and no one speaks to them or treats them with courtesy? What if the Bible class teacher just starts off with the next question in the workbook with no acknowledgement or welcome to the visitor? What if the worship assembly begins with ten minutes of rambling announcements and an explanation of Aunt Sally's gallbladder surgery? Do you see any problems here with first impressions on guests? None of this gives glory to God. There is no excellence and honor toward God in any of it. There is no excuse for this. The only thing that may have happened up to this point in the visitor's mind is that he wonders why he came to this place. And, remember, we haven't even talked about the song service or preaching yet! The visitor may start wondering if he can slip quietly out the back and no one will notice (after all, no one seemed to notice when he came in).

You get the point. Whether we pursue excellence or not has a powerful effect on people! If we don't care about excellence in worship to our God, why should any visitor care about our God? Would he be motivated to give his best to God if we don't give our best? Would he be moved to give his heart to Jesus if we don't seem to have much of a heart for Jesus ourselves? Commitment to excellence makes a big difference. Note 1 Corinthians 10:31–32, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give no occasions of stumbling, either to Jews, or to Greeks, or to the church of God" (ASV).

Could it be that when we do not do all to God’s glory that we cause the very occasions for stumbling of which the apostle speaks? When we do things poorly, could it be that we are turning away the very people we say we want to convert?

What about the effect on the church? When we fail to do things well and allow careless worship to prevail, could it be that weak Christians just give up because careless worship does not move them to greater service?

An Interview

I recently interviewed a young man who expressed great enthusiasm about the congregation where he is a member. I asked why he was so impassioned. He said, “Every place I have always been, I was told, ‘If you are trying, that’s good enough.’”

He further said, “Here, not everyone gets a chance to do everything—regardless of their ability. Instead, the church tries to put its best foot forward by training and preparing men to lead. I also see the value of critique. In other places where I have worshiped all efforts were acceptable; nobody tried to show me a better way. Now, I think about how I am doing. I want to give my best for God because it seems to matter to everyone. I also like doing things in an orderly way and with purpose.”

For this young man, the bar had been raised. All efforts were no longer acceptable. He was motivated to achieve and to excel for God’s sake. His attitude toward worship and the church were changed because he was challenged to excel!

A Final Thought on the Excellence of God

The prophet Isaiah speaks of our awesome God. He gives us God’s own testimony. In that testimony is an understanding of the *essence of excellence*. God is the One who stands above all others. He pos-

sesses qualities that make Him preeminent and superior to everyone and everything. There is no one like Him. Hear this excerpt from Isaiah 44:6–7.

“I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me. Who is like Me?”

God alone is eternal, the first and the last. There is no other God. Throughout the book of Isaiah the excellence of God is revealed. God knows all things and can do all things. And everything He does expresses His superiority over all things. He stands out above all others.

We should pursue excellence in service to Him because He is excellent. Our worship should be a proclamation of His excellence. So says 1 Peter 2:9, “... so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you ...” That is our purpose and mission in life. The proclamation of God’s virtues cannot be done if worship is approached in a halfhearted, careless way. There is great blessing in pursuing excellence and great danger in accepting mediocrity.

We strive to do all things well, not for our glory, but for the glory of the One who called us to His service. Thus, when we pursue excellence, it is His excellence and glory that we seek. By our proclamation, we want all men to see that our God stands out above all others.

Study Questions:

1. While the gospel must never be changed, maybe some of our habits and methods should change. What are some possible changes we could make that would give God glory?
2. Discuss the difference between our duty in life and our purpose in life.

3. In what ways can mediocrity in service to God detract from the glory due Him?
4. Do you think Solomon wasted a lot of money and labor on building the temple? Why, or why not?
5. What are some parallels between God’s people in Malachi’s time and God’s people in our time?
6. Why do you think some Christians today are willing to settle for “good enough?” When you hear people use that phrase, what do you think they mean by it?
7. Isn’t the gospel message so important and powerful that it makes no difference how we do things? Explain your answer.
8. If people are really interested in the truth and are spiritually minded, then they shouldn’t be concerned with what our building looks like. Do you agree or disagree?
9. In the list of 20 things, are there some things you deem unimportant? Which?
10. Can you find additional passages in Isaiah that speak of God’s greatness?