

How to be a Student of Excellence!

~ By Paul R. Shockley

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In my observations of college and graduate students who possess a Christ-centered disposition and who stand above the others, honestly distinguishing themselves in their academic studies, are those people who bear qualities and tendencies of intellectual and moral excellence. Below is a list of ten qualities I've consistently observed in their lives. To be sure, no one is perfect. However, students of excellence are those who purposefully, willfully, and consciously seek to develop moral and intellectual habits of excellence-for they know that character is the sum-total of individual habits. So, as you examine this list reflectively consider your mindset, behavior, and actions and ask yourself: What kind of person should you be?

1. **They are focused.** All energy, time, and discipline are bent on becoming the very best. If you want to succeed with excellence, you must focus on what really counts.
2. **Their pursuits are inclusive.** Daily decisions and interests decisively pursued are those that contribute to the overall goal. Pro-actively make decisions and pursue interests in your daily life that will assist you in obtaining success. Making poor choices, whether they appear to be insignificant or not, could very possibly take you places you never thought you would go. What is unthinkable today may become thinkable tomorrow.
3. **Their lives are undivided.** Do not separate one area of life from another for we are organic creatures. Living separate lives or pursuing opposing interests only marginalizes one from success because it divides up one's energy, time, and attention. Your resources must always be redirected to your goal.
4. **They have determination.** Academic progress is rough, ever so time-consuming, and ever so demanding. Meet every demand with a determination for excellence. In sum, what will really distinguish you from the other students? Consider why a professor should invest in you? Consider why a firm or boss or leadership team should invest in you and not others? What will make you stand out among all others in your studies and career? Why should your fellow students even listen to you?
5. **They possess resilience.** Outstanding students do not easily give up. You will fail sometime or another during your program. You may even become depressed from the critical, sometimes "biting" words of your professors. When those times come, and they do for most if not for all, you must pick yourself up again--for accomplishing the goal is worth facing seemingly insurmountable obstacles.
6. **They sacrifice.** Excellent students purposefully let go of those things that hinder them from success. Willfully discard every hindrance and degenerative, corrupting influence that will keep you from achieving your goal with a passion for excellence. You need to regularly, routinely, scrutinize your life and see whether your environment, influences, and pursuits are encouraging or discouraging you from reaching excellence. When those corrupting influences are identified, they need to be avoided if not discarded.

7. **They are holistic.** Realize, as Aristotle states, that one area of life impacts all other areas, whether intellectual, physical, or moral. Take very tender care of your mind, soul, and body. You need to always seek to be holistically healthy-for if you are not mentally, physically, or spiritually healthy, you will stumble, easily become fatigued, develop inner angst, regret, disappointment, and waiver in the completion of your degree.

I believe that if place your faith in Jesus, believing He is God, who died on the cross for your sins and rose again, you will honestly have peace with God and will discover in that love-relationship what meaning, purpose, and hope really means. Life for you both now and for eternity will be qualitatively fulfilling.

If you already intimately know the God of the Bible, then pro-actively maintain a Christ-centered mindset by being dependent upon Him, yielding to Him in the moment-by-moment details of living. This involves intimately know the Scripture, inculcating the Scripture into your affections whereby you imitate Jesus Christ in both thought and deed. Be a prayerful person. Lastly, be ever so careful not to entangle yourself with the captivating but fleeting affairs of the world or cultivate fleshly appetites; the attractiveness is illusionary. Rather, cultivate a Christ-like disposition that reflects the mind and habits of Jesus Christ; only in Him is there authentic life, freedom, and contentment.

If you are a believer and your life is one whereby you are not honestly experiencing meaning, purpose, hope, and contentment in your life, then I suspect you that Jesus is not #1 in your life. Other pursuits, activities, idols, or sinful appetites have taken the preeminent position that belongs to the God of the Bible.

8. **They have a nurturing network of support.** Students of excellence typically cultivate a network of people who love and care for them; they are those who are ready to support these students anyway possible. Always remember who honestly loves you and who only says they love you. Turn to those who honestly love you for support, listen to their wisdom, and find ways to return that love. Also, you *be* a minister to your fellow students; this is your sphere of ministry. We demonstrate our love to God by loving others. Active support in a sincere and active Christ-centered congregation can offer outstanding love and support.
9. **They possess an inner desire for excellence.** Successful students realize the importance of cultivating a disposition, i.e., an inner character, which desires intellectual and moral excellence. Routinely examine your desires. If you don't *desire* excellence in all things, you need to know why. Struggling to even have a desire of excellence reveals a deficiency in character. This lack of desire for excellence is evidenced in vices such as laziness, apathy, lack of discipline, ignorance, and making poor decisions. Rather, pro-actively cultivate habits of excellence in every aspect of living. Once again, character is the sum-total of your habits.
10. **Live Consistent with their Worldview.** A worldview is simply a habituated way of seeing life; it is the sum-total of your beliefs about the world that govern your daily behavior and actions. Acting insincerely or contrary to who you are and what you believe because of such things as situational setting or peer pressure, invalidates your

testimony, promotes deception, hypocrisy, and fosters skepticism and cynicism among those observe you. Living inconsistently leads to a loss of respect.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, always remember in your studies that the Christian faith has the best answers to the deepest problems; we have the best facts and the best arguments. In fact, the God of the Bible provides the greatest explanatory power among the other worldviews for the Christian faith provides both a stable and consistent metaphysical foundation for explaining the important realities and phenomena encountered in our world and lives today. Consider the following: The God of the Bible accounts for the physical beginning of the universe, order, design, and complexity that is empirically evident, morality (moral values, duties, and accountability), beauty, the human need for God, the inherent human drive for purpose and meaning, miracles, the uniqueness of Scripture, and the historical bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Lastly, always know why you believe what you believe. Examine your basic presuppositions and biases and see if they are rooted in truth, the greatest facts, and the best evidence. If you encounter a problem or philosophical argument in your studies that runs counter to your worldview, investigate the Christian response (s) to the problem (s). I would encourage you to carefully examine the Christian responses that have stood the test of time, endured the greatest scrutiny, and bear the most substantive response. Therefore, always study the best material.

In conclusion: Make your life an expression of worship regardless if you are pursuing studies in the liberal arts, business, medicine, or math and science. Like the apostle Paul states in 2 Corinthians 5:9-10 ⁹ *So we make it our aim to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.* ¹⁰ *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."*