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**JUST GETTING BY vs. PURSUING EXCELLENCE**  
By Jim Mathis

Early in my life, “Just Getting By” could have been my motto. I was an intelligent kid, which meant I could get “B’s” in high school without opening a book or studying. That attitude followed me to college, where I quickly figured out the minimum requirements I needed to meet to stay in school. I concluded a very mediocre 2.5 grand-point average was good enough. That proved to be a low bar I easily reached.

At the time, I was also playing music in a band. If I knew the songs and could play them without obvious mistakes, that was the minimum requirement. “Just getting by” seemed to be good enough. Even in my first job out of college, I asked what I was expected to do. That is what I did, nothing more.

Around the time of that first job, however, I had an epiphany experience. It may have had something to do with getting married and realizing my wife deserved better. Maybe it was something she said, something I read, or a speaker I heard. Whatever it was, my attitude made a major shift. For example, the new pickup truck I bought in 1971 was the most stripped down one on the lot – no accessories. But four years later, I purchased a car with all the options, reflecting my new approach to life in general.

During that time, I started my own business, understanding that to succeed I had to be the best in my field. If someone else was offering the same service at a higher quality, we were failing in our goals. I got the best equipment and training, and invested the time needed to be the best. The pursuit of excellence became the focus of my life and photography business.

This was before I became a follower of Jesus Christ. Then I discovered Ephesians 2:10, which says, “We are God’s masterpiece, created by Him to do good work.” This verse immediately resonated with me because that is what I felt called to do – to do the best work I could.

The Bible is filled with commands to do good work and honor God with our hands. For instance, Colossians 3:23 says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.” There is no place for lying, cheating, or “just getting by” on anything we do in any area of our lives, personal or business.

I wish I had developed a focus on excellence when I was in high school instead of waiting until I was 25. But maybe I needed to see how this quest for excellence could shape my life in a way that would please me and everyone I met.

This life-changing attitude paid off, both in terms of appreciation from our customers as well as financial success. Later, when we opened a coffeehouse, going head-to-head with a giant corporation, I knew we again had to pursue excellence, offering exceptional service and being

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better at making coffee than our huge counterpart. The coffeehouse was an immediate success, achieving the high levels of service, product, and community impact we had imagined.

As Proverbs 22:29 says, “Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men.” Dedication to excellence not only honors God. It also causes our work to prosper and proves to be rewarding in every sense of the word.

© 2025. Jim Mathis is a writer, photographer and small business owner in Overland Park, Kansas. His latest book is *The Camel and the Needle, A Christian Looks at Wealth and Money*. He formerly was a coffee shop manager and executive director of CBMC in Kansas City, U.S.A.

### Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you found yourself, or someone you work with, being satisfied with “just getting by,” doing only the bare minimum that is expected? What have you thought about that?
2. When you think of pursuing excellence in the workplace, who – or what – comes to your mind? What is it about how they go about their work that makes them stand out for you?
3. The Bible says that excellence is the standard God follows in His own work. Why do you think excellence also is what He expects of us? What does our willingness to settle for less than this have to say about our relationship with God?
4. How does our approach to work – just getting by vs. pursuing excellence – influence the impression other people have about us?

### Challenge for This Week

During the coming week, set aside some time to reflect on and evaluate your attitude and approach to your work. Do you think some changes might be in order as they relate to the quality of work you have been doing? Would it help to ask a good friend or trusted advisor about this?

Perhaps there is someone you work with – or who works for you – that could benefit from your perspectives on the importance of pursuing excellence in whatever you do. Try to find a time to discuss this with them in a caring, non-threatening way.

#### NOTE:

For more about what the Bible says, consider the following passages:  
Proverbs 10:4, 12:11,24, 13:4, 18:9; Colossians 3:17, 23-24; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

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