

Gaining Distinction Through Excellence

By Olympic Champion Ben Peterson

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Most everyone desires to be distinct in some way. It is part of our nature. We enjoy being the best or most unique in some way. That desire motivates most of us as athletes. The thought of being the best, of finishing first inspires us to train and then compete at uncommon levels.

To just be distinct can be harmful. We hear about thieves, liars and robbers every day. They distinguish themselves, but not in a good way. However there are many commendable and honorable things we work for to win distinction. I am constantly encouraging youth and adults to seek what is right and do their best knowing that if distinction comes then it will be a good thing.

In the early part of the story of “Daniel in the lions den” the following statement is made.

“Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him, and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm.” Daniel 6:3

Lets consider what Daniel had that brought him such distinction, how to get it and the results we can expect from such. The meaning of “excellent spirit” in the Old Testament Hebrew language is noteworthy. **Excellent** means: preeminent, very exceedingly, excellent. **Spirit** has to do with the mind. We could say Daniel was preeminent in his mind. He was excellent in his thinking.

I. The Characteristics of an Excellent Spirit.

1) As you consider the man Daniel you see he was *talented*. He had developed *skill* in leadership and administration. There was *quality* about his work and life.

May I urge you to sharpen your God given talents? Don't do your studies, practice and work half way. Strive for the best. Do your work with quality. Seek excellence. Develop skills in various areas. It will serve you well some day.

2) *An excellent spirit seeks what is right and best.* It seeks what is upright and honest. It is not focused on being distinguished. It is focused on doing and being what is right no matter what the cost or what others are doing and saying.

3) *An excellent spirit has drive and spunk.* It stays positive and hopeful. There is discipline and focus that keeps an excellent spirit alive, working and hopeful. In my most recent years of coaching I have seen the need to strengthen this perspective. A wrestler must not lose hope in the middle of a match. A strong excellent spirit helps a wrestler through the most difficult setbacks and even in losses, so he can stay hopeful and come back.

II. How do you learn an Excellent Spirit?

1) *Time is needed.* I believe an excellent spirit is learned therefore time is needed. Many learn an excellent spirit from their parents and family, others from their teachers or friends.

2) *We learn from others and from experiences.* Therefore the people we are around and the ideas we are exposed to when we are young are especially important. The choosing of friends is vital. Honest hard working people of excellence are so helpful for us to learn and build a spirit of excellence.

Many a Mother has influenced her children to seek the best by the way she speaks and cares for her family and home. I believe John and I greatly benefited from our Mother in this way. She was constantly working to better our home and family. Her strong faith in God's Word gave a positive hopeful view

even in very negative events. She urged me to read the Bible daily when I was about 10 years old. From that time on it has been a daily habit for me. I can honestly say that God's Word instills a spirit of excellence. I gain hope, direction and confidence as I see God working in the lives of others. I know He can do the same through me.

From the book of Daniel we know he read and knew the scriptures. His spirit grew strong as God imparted His wisdom and perspective on life. I urge young and old alike to make the Bible a regular part of their "spirit building" experience.

3) *Discipline and making good decisions* is so vital to gaining an excellent spirit. Many have had good influences but made poor choices that denied and destroyed the gaining of an excellent spirit. It is usually not just one decision, though there may be a key one. The many choices we make over time build and determine our spirit, our attitude, our determination, our perspective on life.

III. The Results & Benefits of an Excellent Spirit.

1) *An excellent spirit will distinguish a person.* The book of Daniel shows us this. Daniel was distinguished because he had an excellent spirit. Chapters 1, 3 and 5 tell of Daniel's influences and his choices. Daniel made many good decisions and learned discipline. As a result he was chosen to high positions of leadership.

May I remind you that many fail because they put their emphasis on being distinguished, being honored and being paid more. In Daniel chapter 1 you can see that he did what he knew was right even at great cost. He made each decision and choice on doing what was right and good. Each time he chose rightly he strengthened his spirit of excellence.

2) *An excellent spirit is desired, requested and rewarded by leaders.* Every discerning leader knows the value of an excellent spirit in a man. They look for men and women with such and put them in key positions. Daniel's spirit was so distinct the king considered putting him over his entire realm.

3) *An excellent spirit may cause jealousy and rivalry in those who hate what is right.* This point is a warning and reality reminder. Not everyone likes those who excel. They may be jealous and want the position of honor themselves. They may also feel insecure because their own spirit and work is inferior and they feel threatened. So instead of changing their own ways they lash out at the one with an excellent spirit. This is what happened to Daniel. Daniel chapter 6 tells how Daniel is put in a lion's den because of the jealousy of others. The king sought to defend Daniel but was tricked into punishing him. But his "excellent spirit" sees him through even the lions den experience.

The men I know who have continually excelled in wrestling have been noteworthy in their thinking. Through high school and college my brother John was learning an excellent spirit, but he was failing to excel in wrestling. For a long time I have said he was "learning to work hard and seek his best". But he was not around people he needed to refine his skills and build his confidence. When he had a chance to be with our national team he blossomed. Many crumble under such exposure and pressure, but because of an "excellent spirit" John matured very quickly. Within a year he distinguished himself as the 2nd best in the world by winning an Olympic Silver Medal. That same spirit saw him through 4 more years of training and then the beating of 2 World Champions by large margins to secure the Olympic Gold Medal.

I urge you to seek an excellent spirit. Don't be content with just getting by. *In due time proper distinction will be given to a spirit of excellence.*

***Ben & his brother John now run Camp of Champs Wrestling Camps. Contact them at: Camp of Champs, PO Box 222, Watertown, WI 53094; Phone: 800-505-5099; E-mail: ben@campofchamps.org; Web: www.campofchamps.org.**