

Michael Phelps & the Prophet Daniel

By Mark Stinnett

The Apostle Paul instructed:

...If there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

What comes to your mind when you hear the word '*excellence*'?

Precision? Beauty? Superiority? Flawlessness?

Some things are *excellent* because of their intrinsic quality, or perhaps quality in craftsmanship. For example, consider a high-quality silver coin. The background of the coin has a mirror finish. The raised lettering and images have a frosted appearance. This coin was made especially for coin collectors and has been handled with utmost care. It is called a 'proof' coin and would never be found in your pocket change.

Excellence describes proof coins, but only because of the quality of craftsmanship and the high-quality materials.

The term Paul used has more to do with *excellence* as the result of past activity, effort, achievement or performance. So, it is not as much about *things* as it is about *people*.

The Olympic great, Michael Phelps, comes to mind; *excellence* in swimming. His unprecedented Olympic medal performances stand on their own. He swims with such strength, yet at the same time such grace. *Excellence*.

Behind all his medals are years of grueling training, practice sessions and competitions; restricted activities, restricted diet, restricted influences, restricted life; all for the glorious achievements awarded at the Olympic Games. *Excellence*.

Michael Phelps deserves to be on the covers of magazines, on a Wheaties cereal box; on the

morning show circuit. He is *worthy of praise* for his unmatched achievements.

We might also turn our attention to the world of entertainment (as if the world of sports is somehow separate): Actors, singers, dancers, and performers of every kind. We could also think of discoverers and inventors and scientists; educators, writers, thinkers, planners; conquerors, rulers, diplomats, businessmen; and the list is endless. People who have risen to the top of their field in various pursuits of life to achieve...*Excellence*.

The term *excellence* can be applied to most any category, but at some point one has to wonder what *Paul* was thinking about. At some point our minds must turn toward men and women of faith. It is not that they demonstrated mastery of a skill, but they were persistent and insistent; stubbornly embracing God's will as their own.

Think about Noah. Does Job come to mind as a man of *excellence*? Joseph went to prison because he refused to sin: *Excellence*. Rahab was bold in her faith. Deborah was brave. Left-handed Ehud cannot be forgotten; Gideon, Samson. Faithful Ruth was *worthy of praise*.

David would not harm the Lord's Anointed, even though King Saul became his enemy. The restraint of Daniel and his friends while in captivity was exemplary. Heaven loved Daniel. The courage of Mordecai and Esther: *Excellence*.

John the Baptist, Peter, Paul, and, of course, Jesus, our Savior and Lord...and yet...

The Bible is not the only place where godly men and women of *excellence* are found. Stop and think for a moment about people in your own life who fit the description...*Excellence*...*Worthy of Praise*. Stop. Think.