
THE QUEST FOR EXCELLENCE

A few years ago, my dear brother Serghei Corcimaru shared with me a question that an atheist had asked him: “Why did God make the struggle with temptation so difficult? God could have made temptations easier to overcome if He really wanted us to succeed.”

I didn't have a ready answer for Serghei (nor was he expecting one from me), but I have given it a lot of thought since then. Though similar, there is a different implication than the classic question, “How could a loving God allow suffering to be in the world?” This question implies that God has “stacked the deck” so that the majority will fail. That would be an unsettling thought, and when you look at the number of spiritual successes vs. spiritual failures, it causes one to think about it. Serghei never asked me easy questions!

I believe there is a reason temptations are a great struggle. When we consider what God requires, we will understand what is required of us to fulfill His requirements.

Hebrews 11:6 says that it is impossible to please God without faith. Without faith, no successful relationship is possible. This verse also says that we must believe in God's existence, AND we must believe in God's goodness. He will reward us if we *diligently* seek Him. I believe more people struggle with faith in God at this point instead of struggling with belief in the existence of God.

God requires diligence from us. **2 Peter 1:5-11** begins and ends with diligence. **2 Timothy 2:15** also demands diligence of us, and **1 Tim. 4:15** certainly implies it. This diligence reflects our love for God and His word.

We also need diligence in duty and commitment. We need to be faithful in our obedience to God's commands. Like David said in **Psalms 15:4**, the one who keeps his word even when he suffers is the one who will dwell in God's holy presence.

It is not easy, but we must be diligent in our effort to put on the characteristics that God has. We may never reach sinless perfection, but those who love God will be diligent to try to be as much like Jesus as they possibly can (**2 Corinthians 3:17-18**). Without that diligence, we will not acquire those great character traits. Let us not be deceived into thinking that baptism is the end, or that God has saved us just because He is nice.

God is holy, and He is preparing us for eternity with Him. While it is true that we are saved by grace and never will deserve an eternal home with God, God's grace should cause us to make great efforts to change ourselves (**Romans 2:4, Titus 2:11-14**).

Let us diligently work to change our thinking, because that will be the key to changing our bad habits into good ones. **Philippians 4:8** tells us to meditate on excellent things. Our love for God will motivate us to approve the excellent things (excellence – **Phil. 1:9-11**). This is an important part of working out our own salvation (not earning it) with fear and trembling (**Phil. 2:12**). As verse **13** goes on to say, it is God who energizes us to want to do His will.

We must raise our standard of what is excellent. All too often, we selectively compare ourselves with other people, so we can feel pretty good about ourselves (**2 Cor. 10:12**). Making choices and setting priorities is not only a matter between choosing good over bad; it is choosing better over good or best over better (**Luke 10:38-42**) as Mary had chosen.

God is looking for excellence in us. He wants us to excel (**2 Cor. 8:7**) in everything. Paul told the same Corinthians in his first letter (**9:24-27**) that we must be as dedicated as the athlete who knows that only one will win. God is looking for spiritual champions. We must go out into the world, do what God says, overcome the world with its distractions and attacks (when the distractions don't succeed) so that we grow spiritually and become the kind of people who can live forever with a holy God in a sinless place.

God's grace gives me an undeserved opportunity to live with Him forever; however, if I am not diligent to cleanse myself (**2 Tim. 2:21**) then I would be an unacceptable pollutant in the heavenly realm. God will not subject

His dedicated people to my inconsiderate, complacent, faulty personality and let me spoil Heaven for them. We all need to be like-minded, *diligently* putting God first and others before self.