

**BEDWELL
GLOBAL
MINISTRIES**
August Issue

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THE SPIRIT THAT EXCELS
Scripture Reading – Daniel 1:8.
6:1-11.

Introduction

The scriptures commenting on Daniel tell us that, “Daniel so distinguished himselfby his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.” The King James Version in this verse describes Daniel as the man with the excellent spirit. They are words which describe the character of this man Daniel. They are significant because this is how God’s viewed him and certainly this how the pagan authorities saw him. That is why the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.

Daniel had been born during the reign of King Josiah who had been God’s instrument to bring revival to the nation of Israel. It is thought that he was born of noble blood, and was undoubtedly influenced by this spiritual movement in the nation.

The prophet Jeremiah was exercising a powerful prophetic ministry in the nation which would also have influenced Daniel. But while he was still at a young age, Josiah died and the godless Jehoiakim reigned in his place. The revival that took place under Josiah turned to rebellion and the rejection of God. Because of their wickedness, God warned that He would send judgment upon the people, and the instrument by which He would exercise His judgment, was Babylon under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar.

And so it was that the Babylonians invaded Israel, and as was Nebuchadnezzar’s custom, he took the most intelligent young men with him to Babylon. He would use these men to help in the development of his people. They had to be of fine physique, noble character and superior intelligence. Daniel with others, were considered to be such a man. It seems that were not ordinary or obscure Jewish slaves, for they were young men of distinction who would be trained to take leadership positions in the nation. So Daniel at the age of about 15, found himself in the midst of a pagan nation. It was a nation that was hostile to his faith, unfriendly to his way of worship and ignorant of his God. The early godly influences were no longer there to support him. He was on his own now. Yet that godless pagan nation testified the there was an excellent spirit in

Daniel. For the purpose of this devotional we might ask the question as to, "What was the spirit in Daniel that excelled and which was so evident in this pagan environment?" "What were the qualities that comprised the "excellent spirit." What are the component parts of the "excellent spirit."

Notice as you read what the scriptures say about him. Notice,

1. HOW EXCELLENT WAS HIS DETERMINATION AS A MAN OF GOD. Daniel 1:8.

What was the nature of his determination? This was important, for it is possible to be determined about the wrong things in life. The scriptures inform us in Daniel 1:8 that Daniel "resolved not to defile himself with royal food and wine..." He purposed that he would not defile himself. The latter three words are those that are deeply significant. He resolved to live the life of purity. This was an extremely noble principle upon which to build his life and by which to guide his life. The Kings James Version tells us that Daniel purposed in his heart not to defile himself. Note that this excellent spirit is revealed by,

a. The Decision He Made. Daniel 1:8.

It was not a choice made in the emotion of a moment. It was a deliberate decision made in the heart and reinforced by the

resoluteness of his will. It was a decision not imposed on him from without. What is noticeable about his choices is their clarity. There was a lot of vagueness about in Daniel's day, even as there is in our day. The original religion of the Jewish nation had been muddied by mixing superstitions and the idolatrous systems of other peoples. But Daniel was clear in his decision. This decision involved discipline. Daniel refused to defile himself with food from the kings table. There was nothing essentially wrong with king's wine and meat, but the food that the kings table offered was that which had been consecrated to idols by a heathen religious rite. Daniel was a devout Jew and he had been taught that to partake of this kind of food was "tantamount to defiling himself, dishonoring God and denying his faith" (J.O. Sanders p.166 Men from God's school). This decision involved the discipline of the body. Discipline is a nasty word in the pop culture, for we are exhorted that anything feels good do it. But in our walk with God discipline is imperative. The great poet Milton declared that he restrained himself from participating in the vices and sexual immorality which marred and scarred the lives of his peers in Cambridge because he "had a just and pious reverence for his own person." As one said of him, "the dignity of God's image upon him, and the cost of his redemption restrained him from wantonly sinning against God and himself."(P. 167).

Daniel recognized this truth and purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's wine and meat. The scriptures tell us that he and three others went on a diet of vegetables and water. The result of this is described v.15 they "looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate of the royal food." The book of Daniel records that their lives made a great impact on the nation, and part of the reason was that they undertook discipline in their lives. The body, that is the instrument of God, must be disciplined if it is to reach its maximum usefulness by God. Paul declared in the 12th chapter of Romans "offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy pleasing to God." We are of little use to God if our bodily desires control us. The Niagara Falls is a picture of beauty and power, but if that is all it is, it is singularly useless in and of itself. But when the power in that raging torrent is taken and disciplined by modern technology it becomes the source of light and power to millions. In the same way that the inherent power of our energies and inherent potential will become dynamically effective only as it is channeled through discipline. The Apostle Paul saw the necessity of this when he wrote to the Church at Corinth in the First Letter the 9th chapter and the 27th verse. "But I keep under my body and bring it in to subjection, lest by any means when I have preached to others I myself should be a castaway." What is he saying?

He is saying "I am to be master of my body. I must be in control of all my inherent desires of God is to use me. "They must be my servants and I must be their lord." The Apostle Paul let it be known as to why this should be our lifestyle. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 he says, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, who you have received from God. You are not your own. You are bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your body." If we live by this principle we will ensure that defiling habits and damaging vices which will dishonor God in our bodies will be eliminated and rejected. We are exhorted by the Apostle Paul in Romans 6:13. "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, BUT rather offer yourselves to God as those whom have been brought from death to life, and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness." Daniel purposed or resolved in his heart that he would not defile himself. That is the decision he made in Babylon.

Furthermore note,

b. The Discernment He Showed. Daniel 6:3, 1:8.

The first indication that Daniel was a man of discernment is revealed in his purpose not to defile himself in a pagan land Daniel 1:8. 6:4. He could have had his fling and thrown his principles to the four winds. But he refused to stain his soul with sin. His enemies who wanted to destroy

him admitted in chapter 6 verse 4 “they could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent...” v.5. They said they would never find any “basis for charges against him except as they had something to do with law of His God.” There were many decisions he could have taken in Babylon. He was away from the watchful eyes of the religious leadership. But Daniel in a pagan land faced the timeless choice between sensuality and spirituality – between purity and political position – between that which was material and that which was eternal. The question for Daniel was that while some of these things were not essentially evil in themselves, were they the kind of forces, influences or values that were going to help him in his relationship with his God in Babylon, or were they going to hinder it. Would they enhance his witness or detract from it. Sometimes the legitimate can have the appearance of evil it must then be avoided. It was the discerning eye of Daniel who opted for those principles and values which were compatible with his relationship and the worship of his God. He had discerning insight when he made it clear, that he would not defile himself in Babylon. How excellent is his spirit as a man of God. Secondly note,

2. HOW EXCELLENT WAS HIS DEVOTION AS THE SERVANT OF GOD. Daniel 1:8, 6:1-16.

We have already seen that the administrators and the satraps of Babylon tried to find a rational for charges against Daniel. But his character was flawless and his devotion to His God was faultless. The conclusion to which they came was that the only way they could find a basis of a charge against him, was if it had something to do with the law of his God. And so they proceeded to introduce a law that would incriminate Daniel. They went to the king and said to him we have all agreed that “the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days except you O king, shall be thrown into the lion’s den.” Furthermore in Daniel 6:10-11 the Bible clearly informs us that when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows were open toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God just as he had before.” His enemies “found Daniel praying and asking God for help.” V.11. These verses say two important things about Daniel’s devotion. Firstly they tells us of ,

a. His Consistent Prayerfulness in His Communication with God. Daniel 6:10.

The word makes this clear. V. 10 “...Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before...” The significant

phrase here is "...just as he had done before." The open secret of Daniel's excellent spirit lies in his prayer life. It was because he prayed that the spirit excelled in him.

There is no more important commitment in the Christian life, life than the commitment to prayer. Oswald Chambers wrote "Prayer does not equip for greater works... Prayer **IS** the greater work." And Billy Graham said that "the three secrets to a successful ministry are: prayer, prayer and more prayer." Daniel prayed "just as he done before." This tells us that his prayer was not a spasmodic activity based on his emotional life, but a consistent activity based on a disciplined life. This was the force and energy of his spiritual power and stature in Babylon. It is clear from the scriptural record that Daniel recognized his own powerlessness without this vital practice in his life. It is significant that when the interpretation of the king's dream was called for, Daniel asked his friends to pray with him, that he might receive the necessary illumination for the interpretation of the dream. He recognized his limitations – He was painfully aware of his own insufficiency and consequently was driven to his knees in utter and complete dependence on the Almightyness of the God who knows all things. The enemies of Daniel found him praying and asking God for help. At this point, we are touching on the dynamic secret of Daniel's unshakable

courage and strength. A man or a woman who purposes to do right and then leans strongly on the arms of his God is invincible. He cannot be shaken even by the hosts of hell. Daniel, who maintained a direct communication with God in prayer, was bringing together his own limitations with the sufficiency of God. He was linking his own weakness with the power of God. Together in that partnership, in Babylon, in the deep darkness of paganism, they became a formidable pair. They were stronger than all of the forces in Babylon combined.

This truth has not changed. We are surrounded by supernatural forces, by frightening demonic powers. They are as powerful and over whelming as they ever were, but is it not also true that the resources of heaven, the power of God are just as available to you and me, as they were in Babylon so long ago. If there is a paralysis of power in our lives it is because there is a paralysis of prayer. Prayer is still the secret of appropriating the power of God on our lives. Daniel got down on his knees and prayed...just as he had done before. But this devotion is also discovered in,

b. His Consistent Faithfulness in his Consecration to God. Daniel 6:10.

This truth is also contained in the same phrase. He prayed. "just as he had done before..." The dangerous decree of a pagan

made no difference to his commitment to God. It did not change his relationship to God. The story is amazing in that it reveals the possibilities of Godliness in the midst of ungodliness. It highlights the possibilities of holiness in the midst of wickedness. At this point in his life in Babylon, Daniel must have been faced with an extremely subtle temptation. He had found favor with the king and had been promoted to an important position in the kingdom. Darius appointed "120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to him so that the king might not suffer loss." And just when he had reached the summit of his favor with the king and was at the peak of his political career, the decree was published and his faith and his commitment to God was faced with the crises of s choice. But Daniel was not deterred nor deflected from the pathway of faith. The scriptures say that "when Daniel knew that the decree was signed." With deliberate intention and resolute action, he went into the presence of the King of Kings, to declare to his God and the pagan world through open windows facing Jerusalem that he was going to be consistently faithful to his consecration. By this he sends a message to the nation, you can keep your worldly position. What is eternally important to me is my position in the will and purposes

of God. You can take your earthly kingdom because first and foremost I am a citizen of the Kingdom of God. With Daniel Position! Power! Prestige! Politics! Were incidental to his faith. When Daniel faced the critical choice of going with all the favors bestowed on him in Babylon by paganism, or keeping faith with his God, he went with God. He had made a complete commitment to His God and was determined to be consistently faithful to that commitment. He gave all he had to God. A.W. Tozer maintained that "no one gives at all until he has given all." How excellent was his devotion as the servant of God.

Finally,

3. HOW EXCELLENT IS HIS DISTINCTION AS THE WITNESS OF GOD. Daniel 6:23, 25-26.

This man Daniel was no doubt a witness to his faith in the True and Living God. There are two qualities about his witness that really stand out. His faith was,

a. Demonstrated. Daniel 1:8, 6:4-5.

His witness in Babylon began in the establishment of his principles. He had decided that he would not allow the pollution of a pagan land to defile him. He purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the kings table. He purposed himself to purity. He began where he lived in the depths of himself. He

purposed in his heart. The scripture tells us that “as a man thinks in his heart so is he.” He determined that he would live the life of righteousness and holiness. He did not do this of out expediency or because it was the cultural thing to do. What he did in his new land was counter-cultural. He did not go with flow of pagan thought and belief. He made this decision on the basis of his relationship to God and His law. While the Babylonian authorities recognized Daniel’s innate and natural abilities they also recognized something else clearly stated in chapter 6 verses 4 and 5. “They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said ‘We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.’” His trustworthiness, integrity and purity were inseparably linked together with his commitment to God and His law. He was not ashamed to demonstrate his faith in this way. His faith was demonstrated but it was also,

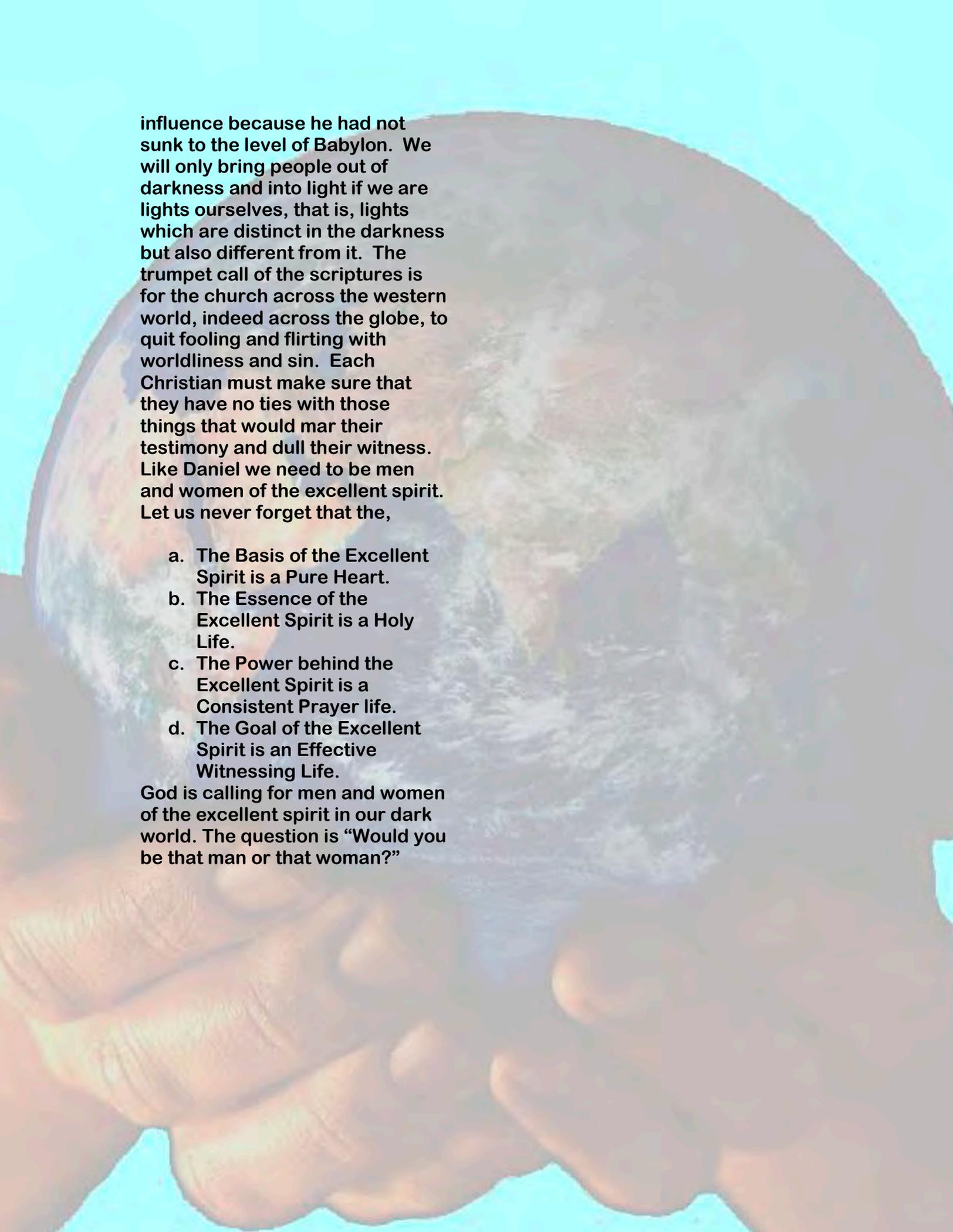
b. Dynamic. Daniel 6:23, 26-28

Because Daniel refused to obey the edict of the king he was thrown into the lion’s den. He spent the night there. The king who was partial Daniel came to the den at the first light of dawn and said, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able

to rescue you from the lions.” To his joy he discovered that Daniel had not been touched for he had been protected by the angel of God. He was lifted out of the den and there is a telling phrase in verse 23, “no wound was found on him because he trusted in his God.” Such is the security and safety of an unwavering faith in the Living God. The result of Daniel’s witness was that the edict was annulled, and the King issued another decree that in every dominion in his kingdom men turn their thoughts to the Almighty Eternal Living God and that they fear and reverence Him. Not only had the witness of Daniel revealed the reality of God to the Babylon Empire, but it had brought God into that empire. Such was the dynamic of Daniel’s witness in Babylon. How excellent is his distinction as the witness of God.

Conclusion

Our culture needs men and women of the excellent spirit. They are to be men and women who are superior to it, not driven by it - Men and women who are independent of it not molded by it - Men and women who are elevated by it, not conforming to it. We do not win souls to Christ by conforming to their ways. We will not win the world by accommodation to it, or by bringing its spirit or mindset into center of the church. Daniel was an effective witness in Babylon because he was different from Babylon. He was powerful in



influence because he had not sunk to the level of Babylon. We will only bring people out of darkness and into light if we are lights ourselves, that is, lights which are distinct in the darkness but also different from it. The trumpet call of the scriptures is for the church across the western world, indeed across the globe, to quit fooling and flirting with worldliness and sin. Each Christian must make sure that they have no ties with those things that would mar their testimony and dull their witness. Like Daniel we need to be men and women of the excellent spirit. Let us never forget that the,

- a. The Basis of the Excellent Spirit is a Pure Heart.**
- b. The Essence of the Excellent Spirit is a Holy Life.**
- c. The Power behind the Excellent Spirit is a Consistent Prayer life.**
- d. The Goal of the Excellent Spirit is an Effective Witnessing Life.**

God is calling for men and women of the excellent spirit in our dark world. The question is “Would you be that man or that woman?”