

On Conscientiousness (that long powerful word)

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What is it?

There is a river running right through the bible and it's riddled with the effects of this word.

- In Genesis Abraham **waited** 25 years for Isaac the promised son.ⁱ
- In Psalms, the righteous man meditates on God's law **day and night** ⁱⁱ
- Ezra, the priest had **devoted his life to studying the law.** ⁱⁱⁱ
- Daniel even though an exile, was made a high ranking official and he was known to have an **excellent spirit, knowledge and understanding.** ^{iv}
- Jesus' parable of the sower showed that only those who **persevered** bore fruit. ^v
- Paul was disappointed/perhaps angry that Corinthian Christians remained **babies needing milk, when would they graduate to more solid food?** ^{vi}
- In Hebrews, we are reminded that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses **so we run the race before us with endurance to win** ^{vii}.
- In revelation, **for those who overcome**, Jesus promises that their names will not be removed from the book of life. ^{viii}



Start



Grow



Mature

The parable of the sower – an interesting example.

In the famous parable of the sower mentioned above, Jesus tells an interesting thing about those who become fruitful in their Christian lives. When the word of God is sowed into people's hearts, there are 4 categories of people. ^{ix}

1. Those who hear the message, but the devil has reign over their lives, so he steals the message and it won't be planted in their hearts and so they don't believe it to get saved;
2. Those who gladly hear the message, but they have no roots (no endurance, grit) so when testing comes, they fall away (backslide);
3. Those who hear the message, but don't prioritise God, and instead focus on life's worries, riches & pleasures. The message gets choked and they don't mature (stunted Christians); and
4. Those who hear the message, are obedient in heart and they persevere and so produce a fruit multiplying – 30, 60, 100 times.

As you can see, the river which runs through the bible for those who succeed is a roll call of such terms as: waiting; endurance; perseverance; long suffering; dedication; excellence, focus and reliability.

So what exactly does this long word mean and why is it important in our "short attention generation"?

A modern perspective.

A conscientious person is typically one who has the tendency to be **organized** and **dependable**, shows **self-discipline**, acts dutifully, **aims for achievement**, and shows **planned rather than spontaneous behaviour**.

Sounds boring right? Nevertheless, modern day psychologists would correlate these terms above with one of the **Big 5 "personality traits"**. ^x

Other typical words to describe these people are: **careful, vigilant, efficient, organised, self-disciplined, act dutifully, aim for achievement, show self-discipline, are neat, systematic, thorough and deliberate.** ^{xi} If you work with such a person, they are most likely the ones typically described as **professional.** ^{xii}

So why would conscientiousness be such a big deal? Why is it so important in the world?

- It is one of the most sought after traits by employers ^{xiii}
- It is one of the traits that determines who becomes exceptionally successful and who does not ^{xiv}
- It one of those traits that scientists say determines who has a better quality of life. ^{xv}

Sadly most of us don't have this trait.

It is a trait only about 23% of us have so it seems the majority of us (77%), despite what we think of ourselves ("I am reliable", "I am neat", "I am disciplined") lack it. ^{xvi}

What are these 23% doing that the rest of us don't do? Is it a surprise then that most people (the 77% who lack conscientiousness) never appear to achieve exceptional success or excellence?

Could these same % if Christians be the stagnant ones who are not growing spiritually?

It is correct that not everyone becomes saved for it does indeed take the calling of God to enable you succeed for it is God who foreknew you and predestined you to be conformed to the image of his Son ^{xvii}, but if calling was enough, why do all the verses above ask us to persevere? To Overcome? To run the race with endurance? To graduate to solid food from milk?

It means that once called, we need to do something about it, if we are to receive life giving waters, to bear fruit – and this is where this term comes in because God is constantly looking for soldiers to run the race and finish it, for one person (with grit) to put to flight 1,000, for two to put to flight 10,000. ^{xviii}

Conscientiousness in day to day practical ways?

Knowing that the bible expects you to persevere to bear fruit, to overcome, to win, and also knowing that the majority of us just don't have conscientiousness within us, combined with being surrounded by an enemy continuously seeking who to devour ^{xix}, how then do we develop the relevant habits?

If you are cut to the heart, then perhaps you are asking, brothers, what shall we do? ^{xx}

Breaking down tasks into daily manageable bits.

At the start of this year I set a resolution/target to read a certain number of books. I then got really great advice: "In order to meet your book target, set a smaller target of reading just one chapter a day". This simple change in habit of breaking down tasks into simple manageable daily tasks has enabled me to in just these 7 months to read more books than previously. I previously, while having a love for reading felt it to be "stressful" particularly when I thought of all the chapters to read. This was especially not practical when you think of other life worries (tired from work, children, household chores etc).

By setting a small goal, I even at one point was reading up to 4 books at a time, simply by reading one chapter of each!

What is your thinking pattern?

Research in personality change shows that: ^{xxi}

*“People may positively change their personalities by increasing their engagement in activities that fit three criteria: **They feel important, enjoyable, and they accord with their values.** For example, if you struggle with details and deadlines, is it because you consider the project you are working on, or the work you are doing, unimportant? If you change how you think about it, could this change how you persevere?”*

Jesus summed this attitude or re prioritising your mind-set change this way:

“And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?”^{xxii}

If you in your mind “see” that your soul or eternal life is the priority then you will prioritise spiritual matters over other matters (e.g success, happiness, career moves, making money).

The apostle Paul used a similar analogy.

“Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come.”^{xxiii}

Same point - he was telling Timothy: Do physical exercise (train and practice), but prioritise training in spiritual matters.

How about other people’s influence?

The same research above shows that:

“Investment in activities with colleagues is associated with an increase in a person’s conscientiousness, and de-investment in the social aspects of work can in turn contribute to lower conscientiousness over time. Thus, even recreational activities with colleagues, including attending office retreats, dinners, and drinks, can help you become more detail-oriented by boosting your sense of belonging and obligation to your work community.”

Applying the above in a biblical setting, the bible says:

“Let us not give up the habit of meeting together.”^{xxiv}

Your turn...

Now that you are aware that conscientiousness is what leads to success but that while not all of us naturally have it, we can work at personality change, what will you now do differently?

The two most important things that it is generally believed a Christian needs are to read their bible daily and to pray daily. These are the ones requiring the most conscientiousness. So how do you start with that?

Perhaps now you can more conscientiously, do the following:

- Use a [daily bible reading app](#) to help you develop the reading habit; and
- [Use a prayer app](#) to help you develop the praying habit.

The third aspect of Christian life that is considered important is that we are meant to walk in community with other Christians. So how will you for example diligently?

- Attend a home Christian group (e.g cell, bible study).

- Read books written by Christian authors?

What other spiritual habits can you start developing/training/practicing to help you become more conscientious?

Write here

NOTES

ⁱ Genesis 12:2-4, Genesis 15:1-6 and Genesis 17: 15-17.

ⁱⁱ Psalm 1: 1-2

ⁱⁱⁱ Ezra 7: 10 (GNT)

^{iv} Daniel 5: 11-12 (NKJV)

^v Luke 8: 15 (GNT)

^{vi} 1 Corinthians 3:2 (NKJV)

^{vii} Hebrews 12: 1 (NKJV)

^{viii} Revelation 3:5 (NKJV)

^{ix} Luke 8: 4-15 (NIV)

^x https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Five_personality_traits

^{xi} <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conscientiousness>

^{xii} <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/10-characteristics-professionalism-708.html>

^{xiii} <https://www.forbes.com/sites/meghancasserly/2012/10/04/top-five-personality-traits-employers-hire-most/>

^{xiv} <https://www.forbes.com/sites/margaretperlis/2013/10/29/5-characteristics-of-grit-what-it-is-why-you-need-it-and-do-you-have-it/#5955ae584f7b>

^{xv} <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/5-traits-scientists-link-with-better-quality-of-life-living-longer-character-practises-a7679071.html>

^{xvi} <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/5-traits-scientists-link-with-better-quality-of-life-living-longer-character-practises-a7679071.html>

^{xvii} Romans 8: 29

^{xviii} Deuteronomy 32: 30

^{xix} 1 Peter 5: 7

^{xx} Acts 2: 37

^{xxi} <https://hbr.org/2018/03/becoming-more-conscientious>

^{xxii} Mark 8: 36 (NLT)

^{xxiii} 1 Timothy 4: 8 (NLT)

^{xxiv} Hebrews 10: 25 (GNT)