

# “SOLDIERS, ATHLETES, FARMERS”

## II TIMOTHY 2:3-6

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### INTRODUCTION

The work of passing on the deposit to other faithful men (v. 2) will result in hardship (v. 3). Timothy would need to be strong in the Lord (v. 1). How? Timothy must fight wholeheartedly and undistractedly as a good soldier, compete like an athlete according to the rules, and work diligently as a farmer; then he will receive a glorious reward. Timothy learns **endurance** from the soldier, **discipline** from the athlete, and **perseverance** from the farmer.

### “CONQUERORS NEVER QUIT, AND QUITTERS NEVER CONQUER.”

- I. LEARN ENDURANCE FROM A GOOD SOLDIER. (3-4)
  - A. Suffer Hardship. (3)
    1. Others in the past and present suffer along with you—Jesus was our great example.
    2. Christ has made you His soldier.
    3. You must be a “good” soldier
      - Persecution and mistreatment will come.
      - A soldier goes through grueling battles, training exercises, and battle preparations.
      - Paul knew the severe nature of the spiritual warfare and knew that he soon would be gone and more burden would fall on Timothy.
      - Hebrews 13:23 seems to show that Timothy did suffer incarceration soon after Paul’s death.
      - Such a good soldier received praise from his commander and would be rewarded.
  - B. Avoid Entanglements. (4a)
    1. A soldier on **active duty** (not necessary in war; actively serving).
    2. A soldier does not “entangle himself” in the affairs of civilian life.
      - The picture here may be of a soldier getting his weapon entangled in his tunic so that it is useless. The middle voice is indirect middle—entangle oneself. A good soldier must be ready to go anywhere and to do anything at the bidding of his commander.
      - The soldier must focus on his duty; he cannot both be a good soldier and live as an ordinary civilian.
      - “Affairs” is the word for normal business, activities; our word “pragmatic” comes from it.
      - “Life” means “everyday life.”
      - Timothy must be wholehearted in his devotion to his duties; Paul obviously applies this principle to the minister, the soldier of Christ. He must not pursue some side business that will distract him from his primary purpose; but it applies to all believers.
      - We must put out of our lives anything, however good in itself, which is liable to deflect us from total service to Christ.
  - C. Strive to Please Our Enlisting Officer (4b)
    - This has to be our primary focus.
    - “The one who enlisted [for himself]” *shows the self interest* in the work of the general/commander collecting the army. The implication is that he would see to it that the soldiers were well-equipped and provided with food and supplies.
    - The one great task, pleasing the commander who enlisted us as soldiers, must be the focus of the soldier of Christ—“one holy passion.” His Lord enlisted him and qualified him to serve; He demands from us “our soul, our life, our all.”
- II. LEARN DISCIPLINE FROM THE ATHLETE (5).

- A. Paul speaks of one who *gives himself to athletic endeavors, to compete in a contest*—some kind of athletic completion (Greek word *athleo* from which we get athlete, athletics).
- B. His goal is to **Win the Prize**
  1. The verb means “is not crowned, wreathed.”
    - A “chaplet of leaves or of leaf-like gold—not a diadem; this word is *stephanos*— “wreath”.
    - The wreath was woven of ivy, laurel, roses, oak leaves, etc.
    - Paul stated in **Phil. 3:14** that he “**pressed toward the mark [goal, finish line] for the prize of the upward calling [heavenly reward] in Christ Jesus.**”
- C. He must keep the **Rules** (“lawfully”).
  1. The rules includes those governing the competition itself.
  2. The rules also include the rules of training and preparation.
    - Therefore, along with the necessity of keeping rules is the **absolute necessity for self-discipline.**
    - Such preparatory discipline included “the prescribed exercises,” a “strictly separated life,” and “a rigid diet.”
    - Fitness is the result of strenuous activity; daily discipline is required. So it is true for spiritual discipline in the word and prayer.
  3. Timothy must be willing to suffer, and he must reject the heretics who were teaching unlawful concepts. Of course, only one person could receive the crown in the games; every victorious Christian will receive a crown (see 4:8).
  4. The Christian race, like any race, **is often drudgery**. The minister must resist the temptation to break the rules in order to achieve ‘apparent’ victory and the applause of the crowd. The only way to win the contest is to endure faithfully all the hardships and struggles that are part of the course.
  5. Paul had done well—fighting the good fight, finishing his course, keeping the faith. Yet, he was in prison suffering as an evildoer. Most had forsaken him (1:15); few cheered him on. But, he would get the crown (4:8)!

### III. LEARN PERSEVERANCE FROM THE FARMER (6).

- A. The Farmer is “hard-working.”
  1. The verb means “become weary, tired; work hard, toil, strive, struggle.” The verb implies that the farmer works until he is exhausted—keeps working, present tense.
  2. Such a hard-working farmer is the antithesis of the sluggard of Proverbs (20:4; 24:30, 31).
  3. Much of the farmer’s work is tedious and unglamorous. But, in anticipation of the harvest he plods onward.
- B. The Hard-working Farmer is **first** to receive his share of the crops.
  1. Far too many Christian workers claim the principle of “first to receive the share” of the fruit, but forget that the principle does not apply except to those who are “hardworking.”
  2. The emphasis on “first” shows that the hardworking farmer has the priority over those who have either done nothing or been thoroughly idle.
  3. Surely, the people of God should reward the laborer from the fruit of his labor; material support is included here as in I Cor. 9:10-11. Paul had already spoken to Timothy about the “double honor” expected for elders “who rule well,” especially for “those who work hard at preaching and teaching” (I Tim. 5:17); then he used the OT illustration of not muzzling the ox (v. 18).
  4. Christ’s diligent servant will be the first to be rewarded.

### CONCLUSION

You must learn **endurance** from a good soldier; you must learn **discipline** from the athlete; you must learn **perseverance** from the farmer.

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