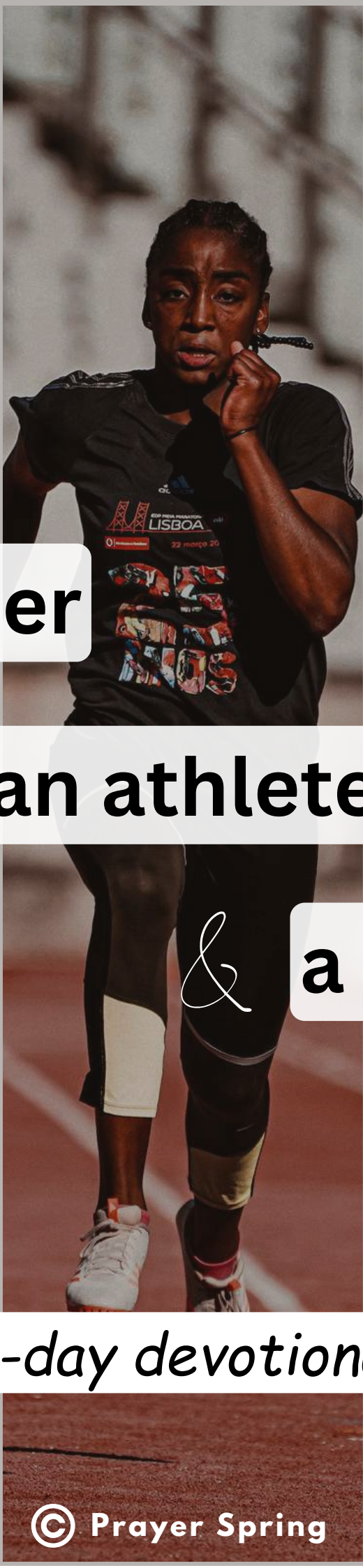


A close-up photograph of a soldier's arm and shoulder, showing a dark, textured uniform sleeve and a metal barrel of a rifle.

A soldier

A photograph of a Black female athlete running on a red track. She is wearing a black t-shirt with "LISBOA" and "22 março 20" printed on it, and black leggings with white stripes. She has a determined expression and is holding a small object to her ear.

an athlete

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A photograph of a farmer standing in a field, silhouetted against a warm, golden light. The farmer is wearing a traditional conical hat and holding a long-handled tool.

a farmer

3-day devotional

Foreword

What does a soldier, an athlete and a farmer have in common? Well, they are the examples that Paul uses to exhort Timothy to be strong in faith and to continue in the good work in **2 Timothy 2:3-6**. This short passage serves as an encouragement and teaches us the core principles of serving God. Timothy, besides his young and inexperienced age, faced many challenges pertaining to false doctrines, false teachers and persecution of the faith. And we all certainly have or will face such afflictions in our faith. Our hope and prayer is that God will speak and provide strength through His word for those times. Join us on this 3-day journey as we reflect on this insightful passage!

“Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor’s crown except by competing according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.” - 2 Timothy 2:3-7

-Prayer Spring Team

Day 1: The soldier

“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.”

-2 Timothy 2:3-4 NKJV

Paul’s use of a soldier as an example is not uncanny, because this exhortation was written at a time he was imprisoned by the Romans (at the onset of the Roman persecution of the early church, which lasted close to 250 years) and observing Roman soldiers everyday in his prison. In v3, Paul says to *endure hardship*, which can also mean to *endure afflictions* or *suffer trouble*. Paul uses this exhortation again in *2 Timothy 4:5*.

Sufferings and afflictions in the Christian faith, can be an area where much can be said about. It can seem contrary to the nature of a loving God at first, but the Bible reveals a greater joy and glory that comes through suffering (*2 Timothy 2:12 KJV, Romans 8:18*). We in the faith, must know sufferings are permitted by God in our lives (*1 Thessalonians 3:3-4 NKJV*). If God would allow His son Jesus Christ to suffer on the cross for a greater glory, we must not think ourselves to be not deserving of suffering. But as with all things God does, there is a purpose that suffering serves in our lives.

Suffering in the faith can reveal these things:

1. God is teaching us his ways (*Psalms 119:71*)
2. He is teaching us to be a source of comfort (*2 Corinthians 1:4*)
3. He is refining us (*Isaiah 48:10*)
4. He is teaching us perseverance (*Romans 5:3*)
5. He keep us from straying (*Psalms 119:67*)

Further, in v3 Paul writes, *as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*. Who is a good soldier of Christ? A good soldier is as such:

1. Unwavering in faith to God

Have you come across the term ‘soldier on’? It is used to describe someone who in the face of adversity has not given up or quit, but has kept persevering. We must soldier on in our faith as well. The moment we come into salvation in Christ, there is a battle for our souls in the spiritual realms (*Ephesians 6:12*). Enduring in faith is what we are called to (*Hebrews 10:35-36*), even through all those times in which it will be tested. We must remember that God is always on our side, that Jesus intercedes for us constantly and we have victory over the enemy, if we hold on to Christ. A good soldier is one who never turns his back on Christ till He returns.

“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”

-Luke 18:8b NKJV

2. Willing to pay the cost of following God

When a soldier enlists for the army, he understands the cost. He has to be away from his family, he can possibly lose his life, it can exert a terrible mental strain on his life. Yet, he chooses to serve his country. What a noble deed! How much more so must we do the same before following Christ. There is a cost of following God, and that is the denial of self. *Matthew 16:24 NKJV* reads, “*Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me”*”. This verse is talking about separating ourselves from this world, dying to our flesh – which is the carnal nature within us – and to be born again in the Spirit (*John 3:1-21*). A good soldier is one who is walking in the Spirit.

3. Willing to surrender to God’s will

Not following a direct order from a superior in any army is a seriously punishable offense, for the soldier cannot do anything of his own accord, but according to the instructions of his superiors. We serve not according to our talents, likes and dislikes, ambitions or aspirations. We are serving not to please ourselves but God (*2 Corinthians 5:9-10*) in all things. Therefore, knowing God’s will for our lives is of utmost importance in serving Him (*Ephesians 2:10*). But, examining the intentions and motives of our hearts in any service to God is equally, if not more important. Are we doing it for God’s glory? (*1 Corinthians 10:31*) Or are we seeking the vain glory of men? (*Galatians 1:10, 1 Thessalonians 2:4*). As any good soldier strives to bring glory to his country, *a good soldier of Christ* must seek to bring glory to God.

“No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.” -2 Timothy 2:4 NKJV

V4 goes on to say not to be entangled with *the affairs of this life*, to have as sole objective pleasing Christ, who has enlisted us in His army. The Roman soldiers of those times were strictly prohibited from engaging in buying or selling in the marketplace. Their needs were completely taken care of by the army. When this verse is compared to what Jesus is teaching in *Matthew 6:24 NKJV*, “*No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon*”, it is made very clear. We must choose who we serve, we cannot juggle between both masters, we cannot sit on the fence, there is no middle ground of compromise with God. He is a jealous God (*Deuteronomy 4:24, 1 Corinthians 10:21-22*) and wants our undivided commitment to His will. If we have excuses in our life today in serving God, it is probably because we find ourselves not choosing God as we should. For when we begin to let nothing of this world steal our commitment to Him, we walk pleasingly before Him. Our God gives us grace and is patient towards us, as He waits for us to wholeheartedly serve Him. Whether it is in the area of money, materialism, careers, our bodies, minds, relationships etc, let us surrender it to Him and ask Him to change our heart’s desire to be

towards Him alone. A good soldier will always put God first in everything and never be too busy to obey His command.

Day 2: The athlete

“And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.” - 2 Timothy 2:5 NKJV

What I believe Paul was trying to tell Timothy and us through the example of an athlete was the mindset. The first thing that all athletes do is learn how the game is played. Without understanding the rules, there can be no competing. If the rules were arbitrary, no one can win and yet everyone can be counted a winner, but only according to their own rules they have made up. Such is the case with our lives as well, if we have no standards to follow or we make up our own standards, everything we do can be right in our own eyes and absolutely wrong in God's eyes at the same time. We have the rules (or laws) given by God, the creator of the entire universe and we are to obey and abide by it, if we are to be crowned with eternal life (*James 1:12*).

What are the rules?

Simply put they are the God-given law applying to areas such as (and not limited to), our thoughts, words, actions, relationship with our Creator, relationships with other people, and so on. Well in short, it covers everything conceivable under the sun. When we confess Christ as Lord (*Adonai*) of our lives, we are confessing Him to have all *sovereign* and *supreme authority* over our lives and therefore every aspect of it. It can be likened to taking a bath where the water covers every part of our body. Such should be our surrender and obedience: complete. All this ‘rule-following’ can be hard for us as humans, after all the saying goes ‘to err is human’. Well... this is true (*Acts 15:10-11*) and what follows is the message of the Gospel in a nutshell. God gave laws in the Old testament for the Israelites to uphold and thereby become a witness to God's salvation to the Gentiles. The Israelites failed and so God sent His son Jesus into the world and Jesus lived a perfect life, where He never broke the law and therefore when He was crucified on the cross, He took our place, and bore our sins. The power of the law itself was broken over all our lives and we come under something much, much better called ‘**grace**’. It is the unmerited, divine favor of God that finds us, even in our sinfulness.

“For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”
-Romans 6:12 NKJV

The law of grace

Grace is a free gift of God that comes through believing in Christ and His finished works on the cross. As *Ephesians 2:8-9 NKJV* says, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* Grace brings the salvation of God, it frees us from the condemnation of the law (*Romans 8:1-4, Galatians 3:10-14*), it is sufficient in all things (*2 Corinthians 12:9-10*), and it leads to eternal life in Jesus Christ (*Romans 5:20-21, John 1:17*).

For all the wonderful things grace does, it is important to mention what it does not. Grace does not mean a free-pass to continue in sin (*Romans 6:1-2,14*). It does not make the law void (*Romans*

3:31, *Matthew 5:17*). Grace won't be removed but we can fall from it (*Galatians 5:4*, *2 Peter 2:20-21*). Grace and the law are independent of each other, yet grace does not cancel the law. The law is good and holy (*Romans 7:12*), the law is God's spoken word to Moses and the Israelites and God cannot go back on His own word (*Numbers 23:19*). An analogy I find helpful to understand the relationship between law and grace is this: **The law of God is like a mirror which we stare into, the mirror then revealing our sinful nature within us (*Romans 7:7*) ; then we seek grace to be renewed and transformed into God's image (*2 Corinthians 3:18*).** The law is important because it gives a true reflection of ourselves and grace helps us to be transformed into who God wants us to be through His Spirit.

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."

-2 Corinthians 3:18 NKJV

And therein is how we are encouraged to run this race, looking to our upward calling (*Philippians 3:14*), finding grace in our needs (*Hebrews 4:16*), remembering always that we run not for a perishable reward but for an imperishable crown (*1 Corinthians 9:24-27*) and towards God's eternal glory. May we all finish strong what has been started, saying at the finish: "only by grace, only by grace!"

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

-1 Corinthians 15:10 NKJV

Day 3: The farmer

“The hardworking farmer must be first to partake of the crops.” -2 Timothy 2:6 NKJV

The final comparison used by Paul was one of a farmer. Ah! the hard-working and humble farmer! Of the three examples seen, a soldier can receive a medal of honor for his bravery and an athlete can win a medal for competing. But the farmer receives no reward or recognition for his hard and back-breaking efforts. What he has sown, he expects to reap, never expecting more. While the attribute Paul brings to focus in v6 is *being hardworking*, I would first like for us to look at the humility that a farmer possesses.

He is humble

Humility is very important to God; to find grace we need to walk humbly (*James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5-6*). Pride can manifest in various forms in our lives, not just in its classic boastful nature of self, but also in other areas where the subtle undertones of pride can be revealed. One such area is the feeling of entitlement: to feel we deserve something as a result of the good work we have done. The natural response that has been ingrained in our minds is that when we excel in something, we must be rewarded or recognized. Organizations run on such philosophies because it gratifies hard work. Though that is fair and acceptable to the systems of the world, I do strongly believe that such a mindset can be a stumbling block within the church or in God's ministry. Entitlement in the Christian faith can be dangerous, because it can make us think we are better than others, it can erode our faith to a system of rewards based on works and not grace, it can harden us in our sins and heresies, it can lead us to walk away from God's will and calling. This thought, though quite counter-cultural, is a kingdom-minded way of thinking.

The example of a farmer is a good example to explain this kingdom way of thinking. When a farmer who has worked hard reaps from his hardwork, does he expect any glory for the hard work? Does he expect to be rewarded on how early he woke up? Or how long he toiled under the sun? Not at all! His humble mind and heart has taught him that the effort is only his rightful duty to perform. Jesus explains it in a parable in *Luke 17:7-10*, concluding with the right response in v10, *‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.’* And so when we have thus humbled ourselves, we can say: “just my part have I done!”

He is hardworking

Biblical hard work is not slogging or burning ourselves out. In all things it is important to remember not to come under such a yoke; our work to God must come from a willing heart and spirit. It must be an overflow of love and relationship with God as well as knowing His heart for the world. Every work will be tested (*1 Corinthians 3:9-15*), and only the work that is done for God's glory and in His will (*Matthew 7:21-23*) will stand before God. For God sees our heart's intentions in all matters.

Further, hard work does not have to come at the cost of compromise, be it of our own physical or mental health, relationships with family and/or God. That kind of hard work is detrimental in the

long run; it can break us physically and mentally (*Exodus 18:17-18*). We cannot run a marathon like a sprint, we have to pace ourselves if we are to finish. Pacing ourselves can begin by discerning God's call over our lives (*Acts 6:2*) and asking God, **"What do you want me to do? Where do you want me to be?"** Another important part of pacing is prioritizing our personal time of prayer and Bible reading with God. This is what Paul means when he says in v6, *must be first to partake of the crops*. Meaning if we have not sowed in our personal lives in devotion, soon the fruits of the ministry will also wither away. All that we have to give to others in whichever area of ministry, we receive ourselves in our prayer closets (*1 Corinthians 4:7*). God is the source of every fruit (*John 15:4*), thus relationship with Him must take the front-seat before any ministry. As a farmer sows for himself as well when he plants, may we also sow in our spiritual lives and reap a hundredfold harvest.

"John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven." -John 3:27 NKJV

Finally, hard work in the Bible is strongly connected to our faithfulness in the work and ministry that has been assigned to us by God (*Luke 16:10, Matthew 25:23, Luke 19:17*). Remembering that we are God's co-workers (*1 Corinthians 3:9*), meaning God has given all the help, strength, wisdom, and boldness we need to do His kingdom-work. This help comes from the ever-present Holy Spirit in our lives (*John 14:16*) and also from a faith-filled community of God.

Thus, as in the *parable of talents* in *Matthew 25:14-30*, let what God has assigned to us be used to multiply His glory and fulfill His will on this earth. Let us not be timid to shine the light within us, nor be lazy to use our talents. Let us also not procrastinate our answer to the Lord's calling, lest we be caught unprepared at the Lord's return as the foolish virgins (*Matthew 25:1-13*). As Paul said toward the end of his life on earth, may we also, with all confidence and grace say: *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."*
-2 Timothy 4:7 NKJV

In conclusion, let us be devout as the good soldier, not letting the world or its troubles stop us from serving God. Let us lean on grace to finish the race as an athlete, and let us be humble and hardworking as a farmer to reap a multi-fold harvest in God's kingdom! May God give each of us the grace and mercy to fulfill every part of His great and awesome plan for our lives. And as we meet Christ face to face on that Day, may we hear the faithful words:

***"Well done good and faithful servant,
Enter into the joy of the Lord,
Rest in my embrace and know my everlasting peace,
Here is your crown of life."***

(Revelations 2:10, James 1:12, Matthew 11:28, Matthew 25:21)