

The Ordeal of Training for the Greek Games; Victors' Wreaths; Paul Illustrates Christian Training: the Soldier, Athlete, & the Capitalist Farmer, 2 Tim 2:2-7

28. Winners received victor's crowns which were actually floral wreaths: (1) Olympic: olive, (2) Pythian: laurel, (3) Isthmian: pine, and (4) Nemean: parsley.
29. Once returned home he was greeted as a hero, guaranteed employment for life and exempt from paying taxes. He was treated to free meals for life and in some cases a statue of him was placed in the public square.
30. This illustration to Timothy emphasizes the race toward spiritual maturity. To qualify to pursue the high ground one must be a believer and therefore a citizen of the heavenly community with *politeuma* privileges.
31. The requirement to submit to the authority of the *gumnasiarchos* illustrates submission to the teaching ministry of the pastor-teacher and respect for the Word of God.
32. Athletes in training were required to attend every scheduled workout and training session, whether individual or group. This illustrates the responsibility of the believer to take in Bible doctrine on a daily basis: (1) independently through personal Bible study and (2) by assembling themselves together at the local church.
33. Greek athletes were committed to the 10-month regimen and there were no acceptable reasons to leave the training camp. The Christian must consider the study of the Word of God as Priority One. Time for it must be the first thing entered on one's Day-Timer and all other events of the day must be scheduled around it.
34. Sex was considered a major distraction therefore abstinence was imposed on the Greek athlete from the beginning of the ten-month training period until the completion of the Games. The unmarried believers must maintain abstinence since indulgence outside the parameters of marriage is a sin and thus a distraction from spiritual growth.
35. A believer that is consistently out of fellowship cannot grow in grace, plus the biblically illiterate believer cannot identify his or her right person. The ability to identify one's right person guarantees husband and wife legitimate and guilt-free sex for a lifetime.
36. The wisdom provided by a biblical worldview enables the man to recognize his "Shulammitte woman" and the woman to respond to her "Shepherd lover."

37. The floral wreaths were awarded to winners at each of the Greek Games. Believers who make the advance in the “game of life” all the way to spiritual maturity will receive the “winner’s crown”: **στέφανος, stephenos**. This may be compared to escrow blessings that are conveyed to spiritually mature believers in both time and eternity.
38. Please note Paul’s statement in 2 Timothy 2:5: if the athlete does not play by the rules he will not receive the winner’s crown. Likewise, the believer must play by the rules if he is to receive his escrow blessings and they are summarized by our Lord in:

John 14:15 - If you love Me, you will obey My commandments.

39. Paul now moves to a fourth illustration, this one uses the example of free enterprise as is expressed in an agricultural economy:

2 Timothy 2:6 - The hard-working farmer must first receive his share of the benefits from his crops.

40. Here the illustration addresses the labor invested in the tilling, sowing, growing, and harvesting of crops. The man who does the work is the first to deserve the benefits of that labor.
41. The land on which the crop grows is his property. The produce that it yields is his possession. The price he places on his product is payment for his investment of time, labor, and expertise. The profit realized enables him to invest in another crop next season. Those who buy his produce benefit from its nutrition enabling them to pursue their own economic interests.
42. This illustration addresses the spiritual growth of the believer. The “land” is his soul and the “produce” his spiritual growth. Its worth is greater than that of silver and gold and its profit is an ever-expanding treasury of wisdom and knowledge that leads to escrow blessings.
43. Paul concludes by instructing Timothy to consider his illustrations as teaching aids from which the Lord will give him understanding.
- 2 Timothy 2:7** - Consider what I am saying, for the Lord will give you understanding and application of all these illustrations.
44. The pastor-teacher and by implication those he instructs are the objects of Paul’s illustrations. We are legionaries: infantry soldiers in the Invisible War. During combat, all foot soldiers encounter suffering of one sort or another but they are devoted to the mission and do not allow peripheral circumstances to distract them from their duties.
45. Athletes, in order to maximize their physical talents must have the self-discipline to practice their event and the self-restraint to avoid those things that would make him less efficient in competition.

46. The businessman must devote time and energy to his trade, ever-learning how to improve his operation to maximize the quality of his product and enlarge his customer base.
47. In a church the infantry soldier is the pastor-teacher. He must be devoted to his task of studying and teaching, able to isolate distractions while remaining loyal to the system that produces accurate translations from the Word of God.
48. The word in context is **στρατιώτης, *stratiōtēs***: this is not a commissioned officer but rather a master-sergeant. He is down in the trenches with his soldiers and goes to battle with them. When the pastor teaches, the troops respond by learning the orders and then executing them.
49. The next illustration finds the pastor-teacher as the **γυμνασιάρχος, *gumnasiarchos***: the superintendent of the training camp. The parishioners are the athletes in training who must devote themselves to the rigors of concentration and group discipline.
50. If believers are going to be successful and earn the winner's floral wreath then he must submit to the grind of making doctrine Priority One: no distractions.
51. The final illustration is the capitalist. The farmer is the pastor-teacher. His job is to plant seeds of truth in believers' souls and nurture them so they can grow in grace from the photosynthesis provided by the Light of the Word of God.
52. The harvest is a congregation that enjoys the profits of wisdom and knowledge that enable them to not only flourish but to also produce more fruit from the seeds they've sown.
53. "Foot soldiers for Christ" is the title we have been given and we must make it our business to be forever focused on the business the Lord would have us undertake.