
MONDAY MANNA
Mar 24, 2025**TIMELESS TRUTHS OF LIFE AND WORK****By Stephen R. Graves**

I am not a soldier. I have never picked up a weapon and stood guard during the night. I have never fought in a great battle, landed in hostile territory, or had a legitimate reason to wear a military uniform. I am also not a gifted athlete. I ride my bicycle some miles every week, but that has rarely caused anyone to confuse me for an Ironman competitor or Olympic medalist. And I have also never harvested a farm crop for money. We have grown a few tomatoes in the backyard but none of my friends call me a **farmer**.

But if I had lived in the days of the Bible, there is a good chance I would have connected in some way to one of these three vocations – soldier, athlete, or farmer. The farmer and soldier were common “career tracks,” and athletes were just as prominent then as they are today. The apostle Paul used these three vocations to present universal virtues people of faith should strive to achieve in their work. He wrote:

“Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Soldiers don’t get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them. And athletes cannot win the prize unless they follow the rules. And hardworking farmers should be the first to enjoy the fruit of their labor” (2 Timothy 2:3-6, NLT).

Paul was saying that each job carried – as remains true today – a dual set of virtues worth pursuing:

The Soldier: Endurance and Focus. Being a soldier during wartime is not fun. It was not when Paul wrote to his protégé Timothy, and today no one would consider it a vacation. War is unforgiving, unpredictable, and uncomfortable. Much is demanded and little is given in return. The soldier must be able to consistently endure hardship without complaint and always remain focused on his task. Once a battle begins, the soldier is in it until his job is done. He cannot take a break when hungry or tired. There’s no time off. No sick days. He cannot let his mind wander or be distracted by chaos around him.

The Athlete: Discipline and Ambition. Truly great athletes are not just talented. Many players have talent, and plenty of them have squandered it. The difference between great players and ones who waste talent is the great ones combine their talent with inner drive and outer discipline. They are not content with the potential to be great. They want to be great and are willing to work and make sacrifices to get there.

In athletics and in work, success starts with the “want” – what we might call ambition. There are unhealthy, all-consuming, win-at-all-costs versions of ambition, but there is also an admirable type that separates humans. It is not enough to just desire to be better. We must take the steps to get better, to be disciplined. Discipline in any area amounts to a series of significant choices, always making the small right decisions that result in a life or career of right choices.

The Farmer: Hard Work and Patience. There is a simple formula every farmer relies on every year: hard work and patience. A good farmer cannot be impatient; a lazy farmer is a

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contradiction. In successful farming, hard work and patience are essential. While most occupations in today's marketplace may not demand hard work and patience in the same degree as farming in the first century, I do not know of any job that does not require some measure of these virtues.

Employers will provide on-the-job skills training for new employees, but working hard is a skill we must bring with us. Because without a solid work ethic, talent, intelligence and creativity are of little value. As for patience, despite advances in technology, there are still many things we cannot speed up. If baking cookies takes 30 minutes, it takes 30 minutes. Developing professional skills and properly training productive employees also take time. They require both hard work and patience – and no shortcuts.

© 2024. Dr. Stephen R. Graves describes himself as an organizational strategist, pragmatic theologian, and social capitalist. He advises executives and business owners, as well as young entrepreneurs. He is author of numerous books and many articles, and a public speaker.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Which of the three vocations listed can you identify with the closest: soldier, athlete, or farmer? Have you ever participated directly in any of the three? If so, what do you think of the specific traits that are cited?
2. Would you say that endurance and focus are qualities you often see in the workplace, or are they comparatively rare or even unusual? Explain your answer.
3. How does discipline fit within the scope of responsibilities you must fulfill each day? Do you think that ambition is a good quality for a successful worker – or can it be a liability? If you can, give an example.
4. If someone were to describe you and your working style, would they say that hard work and patience are among your assets? Why or why not?

Challenge for This Week

Try to set aside some time this week and reflect on the timeless truths cited that pertain to life and work: endurance, focus, discipline, ambition, hard work, and patience. In which of these areas do you think you are strongest? In which do you think you are the weakest?

If you are in a CBMC group or peer advisory group, it might be useful to talk about this with those individuals. Discuss ways you can support and encourage one another in making positive strides in areas that could be improved. You could do the same with a mentor, close friend or accountability group.

NOTE:

For more about what the Bible says, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 14:23, 16:26; 1 Corinthians 3:9; Ephesians 2:10; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; James 3:14-16

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