



## The Word...

"But you, man of God, pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness. Compete well for the faith. Lay hold of eternal life, to which you were called."  
*(from 1 Tm 6:11-16)*

## Pondering the Word ... *"Compete well for the faith."*

Competition...now there's a word we all understand. From sandlots to soccer fields, from classrooms to the workplace; in politics, on roadways, it seems we live with competition 24/7. It's no wonder we're all so stressed! It's a pervasive fact of life and it's global; we compete with people we will never see or meet.

In the realm of spirituality, we compete for the souls of those we love, for our own souls, going up against a formidable foe: popular culture with its focus on immediate gratification and getting ahead at all costs. It feels like a race we can't win. In the immortal words of Lily Tomlin, "Even if you win the rat race, you're still a rat."

When Paul encourages Timothy to compete for the faith, I think it's about Timothy competing with himself. It is his witness and how he lives his own life that will encourage others to seek Christ.

"Competing with one's self" gets a lot of lip service. We tell ourselves; we tell our kids that that's the way to go. But competing with ourselves requires us to be aware of and realistic about our strengths and weaknesses, accepting of our limitations, and being willing to fail.

Michael Jordan once said, "I've missed more than 9,000 shots. I've lost 3,000 games. I've failed over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed." Competing well with myself for the faith, with God on my side, doesn't mean I will make every shot. But it does mean I can't lose.

## Living the Word...

How do you compete with yourself in the realm of faith? First, be honest: is growing spiritually a priority for you right now? If not, none of this will work until you are ready. If so, what area in your life do you want improve? Maybe it's an "omission" you want to work on—reaching out to those in need or taking time to pray. Or a sin of "commission"—gossiping, telling lies, getting involved in risky or immoral behavior. Be specific: don't just say, "I'm greedy." Instead say, for example, "I always have to have the latest electronic device."

Next, lift your intention up to God in prayer. Ask God to help you to accept yourself as you are and to improve. (Continue this step throughout your "competition!") Third, set realistic goals. If you're juggling a lot of responsibilities, instead of saying "I'll go to a soup kitchen once a week," make a commitment for once a month. Schedule it. Set yourself up to succeed. And, fourth, and most important, never give up. Accept that you will fail. Get up, dust yourself off, and try again. And keep prayin'!

## Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

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**Mon, Sep 26:** *An argument arose among the disciples about which of them was the greatest...Jesus said, "The one who is least among all of you is the one who is the greatest." John said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us" (Lk 9:46-50).* Here's the topic of competition again. I can hear the next item up for debate: "Well ok then, who's the best at being the least?!" It seems John is unable to grasp the subtle nuances of Jesus' message when he talks about excluding someone doing good works in Jesus' name. **Reflection/Provision:** We like to have everything spelled out: Do this. Don't do that. But Jesus expects more of us. He expects us to understand and apply his message to all kinds of situations he never encountered. Reflect on a past experience in which you might have missed the subtlety of Jesus' message.

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**Tue, Sep 27:** *On the way they entered a Samaritan village to prepare for his reception there, but they would not welcome him...James and John asked, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?"(Lk 9:51-56)*

**Reflection/Provision:** If emojis were around in Jesus' time, I'd bet he'd use this one... a lot: 😊 Looking up into the heavens and asking, "When are they EVER going to get the message?" I imagine he uses it with me too, many times a day! Like Jesus' early followers, we hear the words but we don't always listen or take time to understand Jesus' messages—what does it mean in my life that "the last shall be first" or that no one who does good should be excluded? Which of Jesus' messages challenge you the most?

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**Wed, Sep 28:** *As Jesus and his disciples were proceeding on their journey...he said to [someone], "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, let me go first and bury my father" (Lk 9:57-62).* **Reflection/Provision:** You experience the presence of Jesus in prayer. He calls you by name and says "Follow me." What are the things that you need to "get done" before you agree to follow? What's your reason for postponing the journey with him?

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**Thu, Sep 29:** *"And he said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (Jn 1:47-51).* This verse hearkens back to the story of Jacob's Ladder (Gn 28). Jacob, far from home, dreams of angels going up and down a ladder between earth and heaven. He realizes, "Truly, the LORD is in this place and I did not know it!" Nathaniel and Philip, along with the other disciples, will soon come to learn this about Jesus as well. **Reflection/Provision:** There are many metaphors and images for Jesus, but I've never heard anyone refer to him as our "ladder." I like it. He is our stable support as we move up and down the ladder of holiness, sometimes close to the top, other times starting over on the bottom rung. He stays true and firm, encouraging us to take the next step up. Pray with this image today, thanking Jesus for his support today and every day, and for "spotting" us when we start to slip!

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**Fri, Sep 30:** *"Have you ever in your lifetime commanded the morning and shown the dawn its place...Have you entered into the sources of the sea...? Have the gates of death been shown to you? Have you comprehended the breadth of the earth? Tell me, if you know all" (Jb 38, 1, 12-21; 40:3-4).* To use current lingo, God is "throwing major shade" at Job, putting him in his place! For 62 verses, the Lord addresses Job with "Have you ever..." questions. And Job can do nothing but put his hand over his mouth. **Reflection/Provision:** Today, instead of putting our hands over our mouths, let's praise God in song. "O Lord my God, When I in awesome wonder • consider all The works Thy Hand hath made, • I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder, • Thy pow'r throughout the universe displayed. • When through the woods and forest glades I wander • I hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees, • When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur • And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze...Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee, How great Thou art! How great Thou art! Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee, How great Thou art! How great Thou art!"

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**Sat, Oct 1:** *The seventy-two disciples returned... "Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of your name." Jesus said, "...do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but because your names are written in heaven"(Lk 10:17-24).* **Reflection/Provision:** I can't help but imagine James and John—the "Sons of Thunder"—trying to one-up each other in typical brotherly fashion: "Well, I drove out 20 demons." "That's nothin'! I healed 25 people AND raised one from the dead!" It would be easy for a competitive urge to take hold and egos to become inflated after such a heady and powerful experience. Thank goodness they remembered their powers were because of Jesus' name. Let's remind ourselves that the good we do is also because we are gifted in Jesus' name.