

INTRODUCTION

July is the beginning of a new administrative year for our church as our Trustees and Deacons start their new term. We need to pray for them that God would bless their work. Also, I hope everyone can give them all the support they may need, constantly encourage them and show care to their family members. Church ministries call for sacrifice. I remember a former coworker who is a big football fan. Rather than sitting comfortably at home to watch games during the season he would have to stay in the church on Sunday afternoons to attend ministry meetings. Besides our coworkers, their family members make contribution too. In this new ministry year we have a team of all brothers. Let me thank the wives upfront for taking care of the matters at home and watching over younger children so that their husbands can devote themselves to church ministries. In addition to all those sacrifices we will definitely face hardship when serving the Lord. There will always be challenges.

The apostle Paul surely knew about suffering for the Lord. He was martyred for the Christian faith. When he wrote his second letter to Timothy he understood that he was coming to an end of his earthly journey. Paul had a close relationship with Timothy. Timothy was Paul's apprentice and later a faithful partner in Paul's mission trips. He was now a church pastor. Paul began this letter by addressing Timothy as "my son." That designation reminds us the form of teaching in the Proverbs in the Old Testament, where a Jewish father shares words of wisdom from his life experience with his son. In **verse 7** of today's passage Paul concludes by saying: Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this. It somewhat echoes Paul's tone when he begins verse 1. Sandwiched between those thoughts is the main teaching from Paul that we will study today. Through the message today I would like to edify one another, especially with our new coworkers, as we launch a new term. Just like Paul or Timothy we are called to be God's workmen. God demands our faithfulness in the ministries He has called us to do.

EXPLANATION

1. 服事的勉勵 Encouragement in Ministries

Paul begins the chapter by giving some encouragement to Timothy in his ministries.

A. 依靠神的恩典 Rely on God's Grace

First, Paul encourages Timothy to rely on God's grace in his ministries. **Verse 1** reads: You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Here grace can be understood as a generalization of God's enabling power, His wisdom and His guidance that we need. Early on in **1:9** of the same book Paul tells Timothy that: (God) has saved us and called us to a holy life - not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. Paul reminds Timothy that it was for the sake of God's divine purpose and grace that he was called. For the same reason, God calls us and gives us the privilege to serve Him. Therefore, we should continue to rely on God's grace in the

ministries that He calls us to do. Among other things that Paul shared God's grace strengthens our hearts, as he says in **1:7** that: For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. Throughout the book Paul keeps emphasizing that following God's calling in ministry will face hardship. But as long as Timothy relied on God's grace he could overcome different challenges. A few weeks ago in the Trustees and Deacons orientation I reminded fellow coworkers that each of them was called by God to serve. It is unlike a public election. Recently, if you turn to any local TV channel you will see advertisements for the election of state government officials. Those candidates lobby people to vote for them. However, in the church we do not vote for the most popular candidates or even the most capable ones. In the nomination process we trusted that God would put the burden to serve in the potential candidates. It was God who picked them. Therefore, we should pray that they would rely on God's grace in their ministries. They should not resort to human wisdom, or blindly introduce whatever mechanism that may be working effectively in their day job. If we do God's things God's way, then God would surely bless the work of our hands.

B. 傳承神的恩言 Relay God's Word

Paul encourages Timothy to rely on God's grace. Moreover, Timothy had to relay God's Word to others. Paul says in **verse 2**: And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. Can you count how many generations of Christian workmen that are described in this verse? I counted four – Paul, Timothy, “reliable (the Greek term means “faithful”) men,” and “others.” Not only that Timothy had to relay God's Word one generation after another he also had to pass it down to the right persons. In this letter Paul alerts Timothy many times that he would face false teachings in and outside of the church. Therefore, Paul reminded Timothy the utmost importance of continuity of a pure doctrine. In Paul's letters he repeatedly pointed out the importance of modeling after the right leader. In **1 Corinthians 4:16-17** he recommends Timothy because he was a faithful student learned from Paul: 16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me. 17 For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. Paul also says in **Philippians 3:17** that: Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. Timothy had to relay God's Word in his ministries whether or not people might listen to him. In our church ministries there are some ministries like worship, education or fellowship that are more directly related to relaying God's Word. However, we should do the same in other ministries too. When we deal with finance we use God's principles to manage the money He entrusts us. Even when we maintain our facilities we also go back to God's Word as our guide. I can understand that sometimes we can be overwhelmed by tasks and deadlines in the church as if we were working on a part-time job. We can easily be content with getting the job done. However, a more important question to ask is whether there is any long-lasting effect of relaying God's Word to the leaders, coworkers and the people whom they serve. In doing so our church will grow spiritually.

2. 服事的參與 Engagement in Ministries

After Paul gave his encouragement to Timothy in his ministries he continues in verses 3 to 6 and shares three portraits to describe how a Christian workman should engage in ministries.

A. 士兵 Soldier

First of all, Paul says that a Christian workman is like a soldier. **Verses 3 to 4** read: 3 Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs - he wants to please his commanding officer. If I can use one word to summarize Paul's advice, it is the word devotion. A Christian workman should be fully devoted to the ministries like a soldier in the military. Paul says that a soldier should not be distracted by things unrelated to his role. Of course, a soldier may still have other personal and daily duties to take care of. Those who are married also have to manage their families too. However, he must prioritize his life such that he should not let other things occupy his mind when he is actively serving his military duties. Just like a soldier tries to please his commanding officer we should please our Lord through our ministries. In this letter Paul says in **4:10** that Demas was a person so entangled by worldly affairs that he simply quit - for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica... Demas loved the world so much that he was no longer serving in the ministries with Paul. Therefore, a reminder to our coworkers is that we have to be fully devoted in our ministries.

B. 選手 Athlete

The second portrait of a Christian workman we can see from this passage is an athlete. **Verse 5** reads: Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. A descriptive word came to my mind is discipline. The imagery Paul shared is the organized sports competition in his days. Some of you may be looking forward to the Olympic game will be played in Rio of Brazil this summer. This international event originated in Athens of Greece some 700 years before Paul. In the modern days the winners will receive medals made of precious metals. Back in the Biblical times the champions would only receive crowns of wreath similar to a Christmas decoration. Paul says that an athlete would win only if he "competes according to the rules." There may be double meaning behind this phrase. An athlete may face disqualification if he violates the rules for the contest. A second possible meaning is about the strict preparation a competitor has to go through in order to make him ready for the game. It includes all the means to enhance one's performance to make him run faster, jump higher or lift heavier. Besides conditional training there are also proper diet and rest. The portrait of an athlete returns as Paul wrap up the letter in **2 Timothy 4:7-8** that: 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. If the athletes in Paul's day worked so hard to a win crown that would eventually fade away how much more Christian workmen should discipline themselves to pursue after a crown from the Lord that would last forever!

C. 農夫 Farmer

The third portrait Paul uses in this passage is a farmer. He says in **verse 6**: The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Paul highlights that as a farmer works hard to tend his field he should naturally look forward to a bountiful harvest. A proper

descriptive word I can think of is the word “diligence.” A hardworking farmer has to get up early in the morning. He routinely does all the menial work of watering, fertilizing and weeding. He endures the summer heat, worries about storm, pest and drought. Therefore, it is reasonable for a farmer to celebrate at harvest time. There can be two-fold application of this portrait to Timothy. First, being a church pastor, he had the right to receive financial support from the people whom he served. Paul tells Timothy in [1 Timothy 5:17-18](#) that: 17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." The second harvest Paul had in mind might be an eternal reward. He uses the same farming analogy in [1 Corinthians 3:6-8](#) saying: 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. Paul uses sowing and growing of plants to illustrate the work of sharing the gospel and fostering spiritual growth in believers. If we are diligent in our ministries we will receive reward from the Lord.

CONCLUSION

If there is a common theme among the three portraits it is perseverance. A soldier has to endure the challenges in a military campaign with perseverance. He also has to submit himself to the orders of his commander with perseverance. An athlete has to maintain strict self-control with perseverance in his preparation for the competition. A farmer has to bear the toil of demanding tasks in the field and suffer under extreme weather conditions with perseverance. The motivation for perseverance is the final goal, whether it is winning a battle, winning a crown or reaping an abundant harvest. When we serve the Lord and His people in the church it also calls for perseverance. Often times your brilliant proposal will be defeated for various reasons. You cry out for helpers but the response is low. You may not get the recognition you think you deserve. Your coworkers may misunderstand you. The people whom you serve may give you unfair judgment or even talk behind your back. Your family members may grumble over the time you need to spend on ministry meetings and coordination. There may even be time when you wonder why you are doing what you are doing. You have to go back to the Lord and be reminded of your calling. God demands our faithfulness in the ministries He has called us to do. God does not guarantee any immediate result of numerical growth. However, if we are being faithful there is a guarantee of eternal reward. Christian workmen: let us encourage each other – persevere, the goal is there!