

## INTRODUCTION

As we step into 2018 I wonder if you have any New Year resolution. Some people desire to shed a few pounds, some want to earn more money while some others will pursue a new skill. Those are very good plans. However, as Christians we need to ask ourselves if the Lord is involved in our goals. After you get a healthier body, more money or new skill, then what? We need to go one step further. For example, ask the Lord to give you better health so that you can serve Him more effectively; or ask the Lord to give you extra wealth so that you can support more ministries or help people in need; or ask the Lord to help you acquire new skill so that you can use it to benefit others. In sum, pray that the Lord will bless you so that you can be a channel of blessing to others. Is that your desire in the New Year? If so, let us pause for a moment of prayer. January also begins a new ministry year for our church. We have ten committees that consist of over 40 brothers and sisters who take care of various ministries. Besides, there are many other people who contribute in different areas. With or without a title, they invest their time and effort in our church. We need to constantly remember them in our prayer. After this message we will set aside a time to pray for them. In addition, we also need to support and encourage them and their families. They will always face challenges. The apostle Paul surely knew about challenges. He suffered in many ways as a missionary. Paul was eventually martyred for the sake of the gospel. 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. He addressed Timothy as “my son” in his letters. Timothy was Paul’s apprentice and later a faithful partner in mission trips. Timothy was now a church pastor. Paul’s final words to Timothy are also good reminders to us as we serve the Lord in the church. While we may not be a pastor or missionary, just like Paul or Timothy we are called to be God’s workmen. Therefore, as we launch a new year of ministries I would like to encourage one another with Paul’s words. No matter what God has called us to do He asks for our faithfulness.

## 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 encouraged 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. Through His grace God gives us the power that we need to serve Him. Early on in **1:9** of the same book Paul reminded 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. Timothy was saved by God’s grace just like any Christian. He was also called by God to serve Him. Timothy did not choose to become a pastor. Paul told Timothy that it was a divine appointment God had planned before the beginning of time. It is also through God’s calling that

we have a privilege to serve in this church. A few months ago we had a congregational meeting to decide new coworkers. The candidates did not need to lobby members to vote for them. We trusted that God had put a burden to serve in those brothers and sisters even before we cast our ballots. Since it is God who puts us in a ministry position, we should rely on God's grace to serve. God's grace strengthens us, as Paul said 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. Paul talked about timidity. As a young pastor Timothy might feel fearful to lead a church. I am a shy person by nature. I often blush when I speak publicly. It is frightening when brothers and sisters look for my leadership and they actually follow my advice. What if I make a wrong decision? Thankfully, we rely on God's grace to serve in the church. I do not have all the answers, but God does. All that we need to know is in the Bible. If we follow God's guidance then we will be on the right track. Therefore, I need your prayer and so do our coworkers. Pray that we would rely on God's grace in our ministries. We should not resort to our experience or little human wisdom. We should not blindly copy whatever that works in the secular world. 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 encouraged Timothy to rely on God's grace. Paul also urged Timothy to relay God's Word to those he served. Paul said 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 that are described in this verse? I counted four – Paul, Timothy, “reliable (meaning faithful) men,” and “others.” Timothy's task was to relay God's Word one generation after another. That is the principle of discipleship. There are only a limited number of students a teacher can train. But if each student in turn disciples another two students and so forth; then there will be exponential growth. A question I have for brothers and sisters is: after you become a Christian have you helped disciple another new Christian? Some people may say: “I do not have the gift of teaching.” When I first became a Christian I had the blessing of going through discipleship training. The instructor challenged us to become future teachers. She said all we need is to be one step ahead of the persons we lead. You do not need to know everything about the Bible. But you can be a teacher if you know a little bit more than your students do. Why was it so important for Timothy to relay God's Word? In this letter Paul alerted Timothy many times that there would be false teachings. For example, Paul said in **2:15-16** that: **15** Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. **16** Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Some of you know that 2:15 is the theme verse for AWANA ministry. Timothy has to relay God's Word in order to preserve God's truth. The same is true for us. We live in a world that is filled with false teachings. Does what we do in the church result in relaying God's Word? There are some ministries like worship, education or discipleship that are directly related to teaching the truth. 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 properties we also go back to God's Word as our guide. We should not be content with getting the job done only. We need to ask whether the leaders, coworkers and the people whom we serve grow in the Lord through the ministries. If so, then our church as a whole will grow spiritually.

## 2. 服事的參與 Engagement in Ministries

After Paul has given his encouragement to Timothy in his ministries he continued in verses 3 to 6 to tell Timothy how he should engage himself in ministries. Paul used three analogies to describe the kind of Christian workman Timothy should be like.

### A. 軍人 Soldier

First of all, Paul said 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 "dedication." A Christian workman should be fully dedicated to the ministries like a soldier dedicates himself in the military affairs. Paul said that a soldier should not be distracted by things unrelated to his role. Of course, a soldier still has personal and daily duties to take care of. Those who are married also have to manage their families. However, when a military officer is serving active duties he should not let other things occupy his mind. Just like a soldier tries to please his commander a Christian workman should please the Lord through our ministries. It is natural to have a sense of satisfaction when things are going well. Remember the two adult sisters who received baptism last week? They received Christ when a sister and I visited them at home. Later someone wrote on WeChat complimenting our effort. I responded: "The sister and I shared a small portion of the credit, but God took all the glory." We are to please God rather than ourselves in the ministries. If we are dedicated to our calling God will bring favorable outcomes in His time.

### B. 選手 Athlete

The second analogy for a Christian workman 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 comes to my mind is "discipline." The imagery Paul shared is the organized sports competition in his days. Many of us like to watch the Olympic Games that are held once every four years. This international event originated in Athens of Greece some 700 years before Paul. Paul said that an athlete could only win if he "competes according to the rules." There may be a double meaning behind this expression. An athlete will be disqualified if he violates the rules in the contest. In the upcoming Winter Olympic in February the country of Russia is disqualified because of its violation of performance drug usage. Sometimes we put emphasis on the result than the process. Not so with the Lord. He does not need us to cheat on the IRS to save some money or trick our friends to attend an evangelistic meeting by telling them that it is only a music concert. If we follow God's rules then He will bless us. A second possible meaning is about the strict preparation a competitor has to go through in order to make himself ready for the race. It includes all the means to make him run faster, jump higher or lift heavier. Besides conditional training there are also proper diet and rest. Serving in the ministries also requires preparation. Have you prayed enough and prepared yourself for discussion before coming to a ministry meeting? Do you organize everything and coordinate with your coworkers before serving? Above and beyond all those preparations do you have a disciplined life spending time on reading the Bible every day?

### C. 農夫 Farmer

The third analogy Paul used in this passage is a farmer. He said in **verse 6**: The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Paul stated 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 “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. At harvest time a farmer will celebrate the result of his diligence. To Timothy this harvest can be the financial support from the people 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 type of harvest Paul had in mind was 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 used sowing and growing of crops to illustrate the work of sharing the gospel and fostering spiritual growth in believers. Depending on what ministry it is we may not always get immediate results. Planning a special event may take months. But spiritual maturity of a person takes years. If we are diligent in our ministries we will receive reward from the Lord.

### CONCLUSION

If there is a common theme among the three analogies 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 competition. A farmer has to bear the toil in the field and suffer under extreme weather with perseverance. The motivation for perseverance is the final goal, whether it is defeating an enemy, getting championship or reaping an abundant harvest. Serving the Lord and His people in the church also call for perseverance. When I first served in the church as a layman leader an older brother gave me a very good reminder. He said there will be times when my proposal is defeated for various reasons. If I react with anger or frustration I might have quit many times already. I have to learn how to persevere even when things are not going my way. There are other situations where we need to ask God for perseverance. You are very confident about a vision for the church, but there are few followers when you try to lead. 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 spend on meetings. You may feel lonely and wonder why you are doing what you are doing. You have to go back to the Lord and be reminded of your calling. God asks for our faithfulness in the ministries He calls us to do. That does not guarantee instant success. However, if we are faithful there is a guarantee for eternal reward. Christian workmen: let us encourage each other – persevere, the goal is there!