

“Staying Power”

Colossians 4:17

Acts 27:25

Nazarene Theological Seminary Message

December 2006

A Salvation Army officer, who graduated recently from Mount Vernon Nazarene University with the Master of Ministry degree, wrote to me following a class I taught in the program. Among other comments, she stated, “I cannot get away from the discussion of Paul’s admonition to Archippus in Colossians 4:17. “Do not walk away from the assignment God has given you.”

The Salvation Army officer continued, “The hardest orders I have received . . . have been those to stay in my assignment and continue God’s work for me there.” She concluded, “Staying orders were a lot harder to swallow than marching orders.”

1. Who is this Archippus to whom Paul admonishes? There are only two references to him in the New Testament: Colossians 4:17 and Philemon.

The Colossians’ passage tells Archippus, Paul’s friend, to complete the work God has given him to do. Philemon 2 implies that he is a leader in a house church; possibly the pastor of the church of Laodicea.

2. The message from Paul to Archippus is clear: “Don’t walk away from the leadership assignment God has given to you.”
3. Paul’s words to this rather unknown Christian leader is my message of encouragement to you.
 - Don’t give up on a God-given assignment until He releases you from the responsibility.
 - Don’t fall apart with the first round of disappointments or problems, when your co-workers are grouchy, the church Board doesn’t understand you, the boss expects too much or you experience the betrayal of trust.
 - Don’t quit when the pressure is on, when others are encouraging you to jump ship or change churches, transfer to another seminary, or drop out when “other opportunities” seem so inviting. Don’t give up!

4. If God has given to you a leadership assignment, led you to this seminary, or called you to be a faithful pastor or lay leader in a local congregation – be tenacious in that assignment or responsibility until God releases you. The issue is not longevity; rather, it is obedience and prayer! **This is spiritual tenacity!**

I have this poem hidden in my office so only I see it:

Don't Quit

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will. When the road you're trudging seems all uphill.
When the funds are low, and the debts are high, And you want to smile but you have to sigh.
When care is pressing you down a bit. Rest if you must but don't you quit!

Life is queer with its twists and turns, As everyone of us sometimes learns.
And many a failure turns about, When he might have won had he stuck it out –
Don't give up though the pace seems slow –You may succeed with another blow.

Success is failure turned inside out – The silver tint of the cloud of doubt.
And you never can tell how close you are. It may be near when it seems so far.
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit –It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.

5. Why not quit? Because in these assignments, it is the Lord Christ whom you are serving, not people! As love and faith go together, so does service and perseverance!
- As Christian leaders, be tenacious in pursuing God's will and way in your seminary studies with your family, on the job, with those in need, and in your local church.
6. I remember reading that Churchill returned to his high school to deliver an important speech. As Prime Minister of Great Britain, he received a long and glowing introduction. He arose, so the story goes, went to the podium and this was his speech: "Never, never, never, never give up!" Then he sat down.
7. If this is true, Churchill captured in his memorable address the admonition of the Apostle Paul to Archippus, "Don't walk away from your work until God releases you from it.
8. Tenacity is always needed, often painful, and a gracious gift. Permit me to elaborate for a few moments on these thoughts.

I. **First, The Need for Tenacity**

- A. Audacious tenacity – God inspired and empowered tenacity - spiritual tenacity, if you will - is needed in the home, on the job, with others in need, in the local congregation, and at Nazarene Theological Seminary. We don't know why Paul was compelled to speak these words to Archippus. However, Paul's words to his friend cause us to question why we are so often tempted to give up on a project, an assignment, a responsibility, or a calling before genuine release comes from the Lord.
- B. Why are we tempted to give up as Christian workers?
1. For sure, the enemy of our soul wants to defeat the Christian leader. “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of the dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (*Ephesians 6:12*)
 2. Another reason we give up is that the problems facing us at times seem insurmountable or impossible to solve. In the book, *Staying Power*, Anne and Ray Ortland talk about the three time periods in problem-solving.
 - a) Zone A is called “Desire to Achieve” and is characterized by idealism, perhaps naiveté, and maybe apprehension.
 - b) Zone B is called “Desire to Quit” and is characterized by confusion and conflict when problems arise. This is the danger zone; Zone B will end in one of two ways: we will quit and abort the project, or we will persevere with “bulldog” tenacity, resisting the temptation to drop out. We can choose to believe that, even in a seemingly impossible situation, the God who has promised never to leave us or forsake us is present. We can choose to believe that, by the grace of God, there is a way through, over, under or around the confusing situation.
 - c) This leads us to Zone C. Zone C is called “Achievement and Growth” and is characterized by faith and personal satisfaction, a sense of realism, maturity, and expectation.

3. We also give up because of misconceptions regarding the Christian life, work and ministry. These misconceptions encourage us to give up before the job is done. You have heard them expressed in different ways:

“Progress is only being made when things are running smoothly.”

“The grass is greener on the other side.” “Bigger is better.”

“Suffering and hardship can’t be of God.” “This problem can’t be solved.”

”Success is gaining everyone’s approval.” “Failure is final.”

“I am nobody.”

“And one of the greatest misconceptions is that “good and godly people do not differ or make mistakes.”

- C. Brothers and sisters in Christ, as you pray and believe for God’s leadership in the your life, be known as one who has spiritual tenacity – God-given tenacity - in your graduate studies, on the job, in Christian service and in your local church.

- Don’t jump from job to job, from church to church, seminary to seminary.
- “The real test of a man’s character is what it takes to stop him,” states Howard Hendrix.
- Let the characteristic of “sticktoitiveness” infect you and hold you steady.

- D. The Need for Tenacity Is Great!

II. **I must remind you, secondly, of the Pain of Tenacity**

- A. The tendency, I believe, is to “move on” when pressure builds, we do not get our way, or the recognition or grade for a cause we receive isn’t what we desire.

To stay in the situation in the midst of conflict, uncomfortableness, misunderstanding, power struggles, conflicting situations and inappropriate expectations until God releases us from these assignments is painful, very painful.

- B. “Enduring” hardship through extraordinary times and situations requires a resolute faith in the God who has placed us in these assignments. And in these “painful” experiences, we must convictionally believe that we remain where God has placed us

until he releases us, because we serve Him in these painful times, not the people who sometimes inflict the pain we feel.

C. Paul's journeys, as outlined in the latter chapters of Acts, were filled with pain - yet, listen again to Acts 27:25 – “Keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as He told me.”

- After being in jail for two years, Paul and others were on their way to Rome.
- Paul's admonition to the men on board the ship was spoken in the middle of a typhoon, a shipwreck, and no food for 14 days.
- BUT, God had earlier told Paul that “he would testify of God's grace in Rome.” (*Acts 23:11*)
- In the midst of the Pain of getting to Rome –
 - The jail experience,
 - Typhoon, shipwreck and no food;
- Paul stated emphatically, “. . . keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.”

D. There is a need for Tenacity, even in the midst of often great pain in tenacity. Now let me testify to:

III. **The Gift of Tenacity**

A. This gift of “sticktoitiveness” – endurance or perseverance – is not a gift we give to other people. By no means.

- Rather, the gift of tenacity is a grace gift from God to us . . . for the spiritual growth, Christian maturity and personal development we experience in the midst of “staying with it” until God releases us!
- On many occasions I have stated, “leading MVNU is the greatest journey of faith I have ever experienced.” In exercising tenacity – staying power – I have been the greatest benefactor. In choosing to believe that God is in the midst of a process, problem or confrontation, I have grown spiritually. I have matured in Christ significantly.

- Why? Because I have had to lead from my knees in dependency upon “the One who has called me to this assignment, believing He will complete in me and my work exactly what He has designed!”
- B. Remember the Poem, “*Footprints*”? The Christian, in a dream, looked back at a scene in his life and saw only one set of footprints. He questioned the Lord, “Lord, You told me when I decided to follow You, You would walk and talk with me all the way. But I’m aware that during the most troublesome times of my life there is only one set of footprints. I just don’t understand why, when I needed You most, You leave me.” He whispered, “My precious child, I love you and will never leave you never, ever, during your trials and testings. When you saw only one set of footprints it was then that I carried You.”
- I have prayed many times during the past several years, not just that the Lord would be with me and give me wisdom for my work, but that He would carry me through the difficult times.

- C. Remember Moses and his excuses before God? God said to Moses “I am sending you to the King of Egypt so that you can lead my people out of Egypt.” Moses said, “I am nobody. No Lord, don’t send me! I am a poor speaker, slow and hesitant. No Lord, please send someone else.” God responded to Moses: “I will be with you!”

And God says to us, “It is I – the great ‘I am’ who calls, empowers, keeps and carries us.” Christian friends, never forget! We are the blessed, graced, and gifted children of God!

And, God reminds us through Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, my children, for my power is made strong in your weakness.” (*II Corinthians 12:9*)

- D. Remember these prison words of Paul from jail in Rome; “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do *all* things through Him who gives me strength” (*Philippians 4:21*)

IV. **Tenacity, With Contentment! What A Profound Gift From God To Us!**

God enables us to “stay the course” until He releases us from an assignment! And who benefits the most? Only God knows. But, for sure, we who “endure” by God’s grace are blessed. Tenacity is a grace gift from God to us!

Conclusion

- A. I close this message with the words of a contemporary song I hear often on the MVNU radio station:

Lord, I believe in you,
I'll always believe in you.
Though I can't see you with my eyes
Deep in my heart
Your presence I find.
Lord I believe in you.
And I'll keep my trust in you.
Let the whole world say what they may
No one can take this joy away
Lord I believe.

- B. And because we believe in Him who is faithful, we can be faithful to the responsibilities, assignments, and calling God gives to us.
- C. By God’s grace, and faithfulness, don’t quit, never give up! *“Be strong and of good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them, for the Lord thy God, it is He who goes with you, He will never leave you nor forsake you.” Deuteronomy 31:6* Do not walk away from the assignment God gives to you. He will complete the assignment or release you from it, in His time!
- D. “Complete the work to which God leads you and to which He calls you and trust Him radically to do work through you what you can not do in your own strength!” Amen.