

The “Grace Gift” of Tenacity

Baccalaureate Sermon

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Colossians 4:17

Acts 27:25

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A Salvation Army officer graduating this weekend with the Master of Ministry degree, wrote to me recently 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.’”

She continued, “The hardest orders I have received . . . have been those to stay in my assignment and continue... “She concluded, “Staying orders.” She concluded, “were a lot harder to swallow than marching orders.”

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, his 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.

The message from Paul to Archippus is clear: **Don't walk away from the leadership assignment God has given to you.**

Paul's message to this rather unknown Christian leader is my final word to you before you graduate from Mount Vernon Nazarene University.

Never 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, or the boss expects too much.

Don't quit when the pressure is on, when others are encouraging you to jump ship or change churches, and when other opportunities seem so inviting. Don't give up!

If God has given to you an assignment, led you to a job, 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 is when things seem worst that you must not
quit.*

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 MVNU graduates, be tenacious in pursuing God's will and way in your home, on the job, with those in need, and with your local church.

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, went to the podium, and this was his speech: Never, never, never, never give up! Then he sat down

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. *Recently I've been thinking about tenacity. It is always needed, often painful, and a gracious gift. Permit me to elaborate for a few moments on these thoughts.*

First, The Need for Tenacity.

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 Mount Vernon Nazarene University. 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.

Why are we tempted to give up as Christian workers?

For sure the enemy of our soul wants to defeat the Christian worker. 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)

Another reason we give up is that the problems facing us at times seems insurmountable or impossible to solve.

In the book, *Staying Power*, Anne and Ray Ortland talk about the three time periods all problems have.

Zone A is called “Desire to Achieve” and is characterized by idealism, perhaps naivete, and maybe apprehension.

Zone B is called “Desire to Quit” and is characterized by confusion and conflict when problems arise. This is the danger zone: problems need to be separated, spelled out and tackled one by one. 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.

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.

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.

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.”

Graduates, as you pray and believe for God’s leadership in the next phase of your life, be known as one who has spiritual tenacity ñ 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 or from church to church.

“The real test of a man’s character is what it takes to stop him”, states Howard Hendrix.

Let the characteristic of stick-to-itiveness infect you and hold you steady.

D. The *Need* for Tenacity Is Great!

I must remind you, secondly, of the Pain of Tenacity

The tendency, I believe, is to move on when pressure builds, we do not get our way, or recognition 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.

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 believe deeply 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 can learn much about the pain of tenacity from Ernest Shackleton and his 1914 Antarctic Expedition. Not known as a Christian, yet he taught us much through example about the necessity of Endurance in our various leadership roles.

In August 1914, Ernest Shackleton, an intrepid British explorer, boarded the ship, Endurance. He and his team of 27 men set sail for the South Atlantic. The group wanted to be the first to cross Antarctica.

Early the next year, their ship, the Endurance, was trapped by ice. By October 1915, still half a continent away from their intended base, the ship was crushed by ice. In the months that followed the crew's food and water disappeared. Shackleton and his men, drifting on ice packs, were castaways in one of the most savage regions of the world. They trekked endlessly over barren, frozen ice.

More than a year after the shipwreck Shackleton and his men were stranded on an island. They appeared safe for the moment. The food was dwindling, and there appeared little hope of rescue. Survival, Shackleton realized, depended on a bold act. He must reach an outpost by crossing 800 miles of tempestuous sea in an open boat, only to be confronted by the ominous glacier and mountains that he and two others would endure. He took the chance. Amazingly, everyone survived.

Everyone!

Paul's journeys, as outlined in the latter book of Acts, were filled with similar experiences! 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 were 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."

There is a need for Tenacity, even in the midst of often great pain in tenacity.

Now let me testify to The Gift of Tenacity

This gift of stick-to-itiveness (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 or 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.

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 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 testing. When you saw only one set of footprints it was then that I carried You."

I have prayed many times during the past year, 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.

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.” Graduates, 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)

Remember these prison words of Paul; *“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).

Regarding contentment, years ago, I read these words, . . . If we are not content with what we have, we will never be content with what we want!

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

I close this Baccalaureate address with a reminder of Paul’s words to Archippus: *Do not walk away from the assignment God gives to you!*

When the valley is deep, when the mountain is steep,

When the body is weary, when we stumble or fall;

When the choices are hard, when we’re battered and scarred,

When we’ve spent our resources, when we’ve given all ---

In Jesus name, we press on. In Jesus name, we press on.

May God find each MVNU graduate faithful to the responsibilities He gives to you.
Complete the work to which God leads you.

By God’s grace, don’t quit, never give up!

E. LeBron Fairbanks, president

