

# OpenTheo

## April 1st: Proverbs 30 & 1 Timothy 4

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The wisdom of Agur. The Christian life compared to an athletic discipline.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Proverbs 30. The words of Agur, son of Jaichar. The Oracle.

The man declares, I am weary, O God. I am weary, O God, and worn out. Surely I am too stupid to be a man.

I have not the understanding of a man. I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the Holy One. Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name? And what is his son's name? Surely you know.

Every word of God proves true. He is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you, and you be found a liar.

Two things I ask of you. Deny them not to me before I die. Remove far from me

falsehood and lying.

Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you, and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor and steal, and profane the name of my God. Do not slander a servant to his master, lest he curse you, and you be held guilty.

There are those who curse their fathers, and do not bless their mothers. There are those who are clean in their own eyes, but are not washed of their filth. There are those, how lofty are their eyes, how high their eyelids lift.

There are those whose teeth are swords, whose fangs are knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, the needy from among mankind. The leech has two daughters. Give and give.

Three things are never satisfied. Four never say enough. Sheol, the barren womb, the land never satisfied with water, and the fire that never says enough.

The eye that mocks a father, and scorns to obey a mother, will be picked out by the ravens of the valley, and eaten by the vultures. Three things are too wonderful for me. Four I do not understand.

The way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a virgin. This is the way of an adulteress. She eats and wipes her mouth, and says, I have done no wrong.

Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up, a slave when he becomes king, and a fool when he is filled with food, an unloved woman when she gets a husband, and a maidservant when she displaces her mistress. Four things on earth are small, but they are exceedingly wise. The ants are a people not strong, yet they provide their food in the summer.

The rock badgers are a people not mighty, yet they make their homes in the cliffs. The locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank. The lizard you can take in your hands, yet it is in king's palaces.

Three things are stately in their tread, four are stately in their stride. The lion, which is mightiest among beasts, and does not turn back before any. The strutting rooster, the he-goat, and a king whose army is with him.

If you have been foolish, exalting yourself, or if you have been devising evil, put your hand on your mouth, for pressing milk produces curds, pressing the nose produces blood, and pressing anger produces strife. Proverbs chapter 30 is a new gathering of proverbs. It belongs to Agur the son of Jaker, a figure about whom we know nothing else.

The sayings of this chapter consist of a personal confession, followed by a number of numerical proverbs or epigrams. The style of the proverbs of this chapter differ markedly from those in the preceding sections of the book. It might be an appendix.

The extent of the material of Agur in this chapter is debated. Some say that it only takes us up to verse 4, others suggest verse 6 or 9, some up to verse 14, and others have argued that the entire chapter 30 belongs to Agur. The sayings of Agur, or at least the initial part, is described as an oracle, a divinely inspired message.

We usually associate the oracle with the literature, but here at the end of a wisdom book, in Proverbs, it is applied to a number of wisdom sayings. We find a similar formula for an oracle in places like 2 Samuel chapter 23 verse 1. Now these are the last words of David, the oracle of David the son of Jesse, the oracle of the man who was raised on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel. One of the first questions facing the interpreter of this chapter is whether there is a change of speaker between verses 1 to 4 and 5 to 6. Depending on our treatment of this question, we will read this section rather differently.

Bruce Waltke argues for the unity of this section, using the analogy of Job chapter 28 verses 12 to 28, where Job also moves from a confession of man's insufficiency to discover wisdom, to a series of rhetorical questions that point to God's unique possession of such wisdom, to a recognition that God can teach men such wisdom. Some scholars see at the beginning, in the statement I am weary O God, I am weary and worn out, personal names of the people to whom Eger is speaking, Ithiel and Eukal. These would presumably be the sons of Eger.

However, if these are their names, we are not told that they are his sons here, which is one of the considerations that might lead us to lean in favour of reading these words as part of his confession, a reference to his weariness and being worn out. While some have seen in Eger's statement, an impious statement of someone who does not have the fear of the Lord, this is unlikely. Far more likely he is expressing the limitations of human wisdom and the bounds placed upon the extent to which it can aspire to the knowledge of God.

Eger speaks in a self-deprecating fashion. Michael Fox compares Eger's statement here to that found in Psalm 73 verse 22. I was brutish and ignorant, I was like a beast toward you.

Eger denies possession of such knowledge, and the knowledge in question is probably not the sort of wisdom that is being discussed in the rest of the Book of Proverbs. Rather, it is the knowledge of the Holy One, a knowledge of God's secret and hidden ways. For Eger, God's thoughts greatly exceed our thoughts, and his ways are beyond our understanding.

The rhetorical questions of verse 4 should remind us of Job chapter 28 verses 12-22. But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know its worth, and it is not found in the land of the living. The deep says, It is not in me, and the sea says, It is not with me.

It cannot be bought for gold, and silver cannot be weighed as its price. It cannot be valued in the gold of Ophir, in precious onyx or sapphire. Gold and glass cannot equal it, nor can it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold.

No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal. The price of wisdom is above pearls. The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it, nor can it be valued in pure gold.

From where, then, does wisdom come? And where is the place of understanding? It is hidden from the eyes of all living, and concealed from the birds of the air. Abaddon and Death say, We have heard a rumor of it with our ears. Eger's saying from these rhetorical questions moves into a confession of the word of God.

The word of God is the ultimate source of truth and security. For the man who feels keenly his lack of wisdom, he must look to the Lord. It is from the Lord that he will find his protection, and from whom he will learn understanding.

Job 28.23-28 God understands the way to it, and He knows its place. For He looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens. When He gave to the wind its weight, and apportioned the waters by measure, when He made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder, then He saw it and declared it, He established it and searched it out.

And He said to man, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding. Verses 7-9 contain a prayer which is very unusual in the wisdom literature. Within it Eger prays for deliverance from falsehood and lying.

Within his prayer he is concerned that he maintain his integrity. He does not want to be a person given to deceit, and in his prayer he is seeking the Lord's help in this matter. Likewise he wants neither poverty nor riches.

He desires moderation in his possessions, because he knows that if he has a lot, he will be faced with the temptation of practical atheism, and if he has too little, he will be tempted to become a thief. More than anything else he wants to ensure that he lives a life that is honouring to God, a life that is pious and characterised by integrity. If he is going to live such a life, he will need the Lord's protection from temptation, and his empowering strength.

Within the Book of Proverbs slander is seen to be universally wrong. Verse 10 speaks of slandering a servant to his master, a situation where the object of one's slander is defenceless and vulnerable, and the act of slander could be severely damaging. In such

a situation the slave can appeal to the Lord.

A slave who cursed the slanderer in such a situation would be invoking the Lord's judgment upon the person. Those who mistreat the poor should beware of such consequences. This chapter contains several numerical proverbs or epigrams, many of them of the form X and X plus 1. The number of items is generally X plus 1, with the final element being the one that is particularly emphasised.

The lists generally involve classing together several diverse and disparate phenomena, inviting the reader to reflect upon the comparisons or associations between them. Verses 11 to 14 are held together by the repeated there are those, or in other translations, a generation that. A single group is being described here, and the reader is being invited to reflect upon the logic of the association of their characteristics, dishonouring parents, self-righteousness, haughtiness and cruelty.

Fox argues that one of the effects of this is to highlight the collective character of sin. These verses describe the way that an entire people can become distinctively corrupted by evil. The sins that are mentioned in this list are sins that are also mentioned elsewhere in the Book of Proverbs, for instance cursing father and mother, Proverbs 20.20. If one curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in utter darkness.

Self-righteousness is spoken against in 20.9. Who can say I have made my heart pure? I am clean from my sin. Along with these there are frequent warnings against the haughty and the proud, and then against those who devour the poor. The leech of verse 15 has two daughters with identical names and demands.

This might be a reference to the suckers on both ends of the horse leech. It is connected with the evil generation that precedes it, and with the four insatiable things that follow. You are supposed to recognise such a figure and avoid them.

From the second half of verse 15 into verse 16 we have the first proverb of the form x things and x plus 1 things. Here it is three things that are never satisfied, four that never say enough. The point of the proverb is for us to ponder upon the connections between the different items, to think about analogies between them and ways in which the analogies and connections open up windows into a deeper reality.

In this particular proverb we have two frustrated sources of life which are insatiable bracketed by corresponding sources of death and destruction which are also insatiable. Sheol or the grave is the place of death that can never be filled up. The barren womb is the source of life that has been frustrated.

There is a natural correspondence between these two things. The grave itself is like a barren womb that will be opened up in the event of Christ's resurrection. The prophet Isaiah speaks of the earth giving birth to its dead.

Just as the womb and the tomb are opposing yet related forces so water and fire stand in opposition. Here the land never satisfied with water is also like the barren womb that produces no fruit. The destroying fire for its part is like Sheol.

This proverb invites us to think about the parallels between things that devour and things that cannot bring forth. It also encourages us to reflect upon the insatiability of the force of death within the creation. Verse 17 seems to stand out a bit in its context.

Perhaps a connection between this and the surrounding proverbs could be inferred from Proverbs 27.20 Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied and never satisfied are the eyes of man. From a proverb about that which is never satisfied, Sheol being one example, we now move to a proverb concerning the eye of the wicked son. Such an eye will be picked out by the ravens and the vultures.

Creation itself abhors such dishonouring of parents. The numerical proverb that follows concerns four wonderful things. In particular the wonderful things are the ways of the four items that are described, belonging to various realms.

The eagle in the sky, the serpent on the rock, the ship on the seas and the man with the virgin. Once again these items do not appear to have been chosen at random. The eagle and the serpent are a pairing of natural creatures, one in the sky, one on the earth.

The ship and the man with the virgin are both human things, one on the seas and one on the land. If you spend any time looking at an eagle soaring in the heavens or a serpent gliding on a large rock, you may well marvel at the effortless yet remarkable way that they move. The eagle's realm is the sky, the serpent is on the rock, the ship is on the high seas and there we can marvel at the way that a human vessel can move with the waves and with winds, forces of immense strength, yet follow a course of human direction.

The fourth element in the list stands out from the other three however. Those three former elements evoke something of the wonder of creation itself of the natural world and of human activity within it and now the fourth element concerns something more marvellous still, the way of a man with a young woman, presumably one who has not yet had sexual experience. There is something properly mysterious about the sexual relationship between a man and a woman, especially in the initial consummation of a union, and this wonderful character invites us to think of it in terms of the wonders of the cosmos more generally.

There is something occurring in such sexual union that exceeds our understanding, something delightful and beautiful, something that should invite our awe and our wonder. There is however a fifth way that is added to this proverb which is the way of the adulteress, which seen against the backdrop of the way of a man with a virgin, is perceived in its true ugliness. In euphemistic language, Eger describes the adulteress

who eats and wipes her mouth, engaging in sexual relations and then cleaning up, as if nothing had happened at all, as if she hadn't profaned something wonderful by her perverse actions.

Verses 21 to 23 contain a numerical proverb that speaks about disruptions to the social order. The earth trembles beneath these things. They represent a sort of social earthquake.

The first is the slave or the lower official who becomes a king, presumably in an act of revolution. The next is the fool or social outcast who is filled with food. Then there is the unloved or hateful woman who gets a husband, gaining much social influence to perform her mischief.

And then there is the maidservant who displaces her mistress, presumably by getting the master to commit adultery with her and cast out his wife. Each of these characters have larger social ramifications that disrupt much around them. The person who desires the good order of a society should feel a sense of horror at each one of these examples.

From great social threats, we move to examples of animals that we can learn from. The animals described here are weak or small, but have compensating forms of wisdom. Proverbs 6, verse 6 directed the sluggard to pay attention to the ant and learn from his behaviour.

Here the ants are characterised by their diligent providence. They lay up food in the summer so that they will be prepared when the difficult days come. They do this despite not being strong.

The wisdom of providence can compensate for physical weakness. The rock badgers are also not mighty, and yet they compensate for this by making their homes in secure locations. The locusts don't have a king, and yet they still exhibit great unity, wisely marching in ranks.

The lizard is the final example. The lizard is weak and can be taken up in human hands, but nonetheless it is found in king's palaces. No compensating wisdom of the lizard is mentioned here.

Rather the point is that if the lizard, with its weakness and its vulnerability can be found in king's palaces, the wise man who compensates for his forms of weakness should be able to be found there too. Once again the proverb has a poetic structure to it that invites closer reflection. You can see in verses 25 and 26 they are held together by the reference to a people, and in verses 27 to 28 with the reference to a king.

The final numerical proverb concern things that are regal in the way that they move. The first three examples in this list are animals, and the final one is the king surrounded by his army. The stately animals each exhibit certain traits.

The lion is mighty, and by his strength provides a deterrent for any who would want to attack. The lion is not afraid of any creature, and he exhibits his regal character in his fearlessness. Many societies have recognised the regal character of the lion, speaking of him as the king of the jungle or the king of the beasts.

Lions have been taken as symbols of rulers, not least in Israel, with the lion of the tribe of Judah. The strutting rooster is another example of a regal animal. The rooster struts with command.

He is aggressive towards any threat. He keeps others in line. He both provides and courageously protects.

The he-goat is another example of a regal figure. He is a sure-footed and inquisitive figure who establishes dominance within his group. Like the lion with the pride, or the rooster with the brood of chickens, the he-goat is a creature committed to the group around him.

In all of these animals, we see something of the virtues that should characterise the king's relationship with his army. The king needs to project an effective image of might so that people don't attack. The king needs to be fierce against all aggressors and to establish dominance, all in service of his people.

The prominence of the figure and the context of the king in these proverbs suggests that it might be directed particularly to people in the context of rule and authority in a society. The chapter ends with a warning, seemingly directed to those who exalt themselves as rulers in a way that is proud or who have devised evil. Such foolish rulers are advised to stop immediately, and they are warned against the consequences of oppression.

Pressing milk produces curds, pressing the nose produces blood, and pressing anger, constantly inciting a people by oppressive policies, will produce strife and violence. If you want to rule over a peaceful people, you must be acutely aware of the dangers of pressing anger. A question to consider.

We noted the characterisation of the generation in verses 11-14. What might be some of the ways in which the vices of the generation described in those verses produce or encourage each other? 1st Timothy chapter 4 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.



If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith, and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent silly myths, rather train yourself for godliness, for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, for to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hopes set on the living God, who is the saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.

Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come devote yourself to the public reading of scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

Do not neglect the gift you have which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching.

Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. From instructions concerning the ordering of the church, in 1st Timothy chapter 4, Paul addresses Timothy more directly concerning his role in the situation in Ephesus. Firstly there are the false teachings that he needs to address, then there are the ways that he needs to behave and the actions that he needs to take as a servant of Jesus Christ.

Paul begins by presenting some of the challenges that the Ephesian church is facing within the framework of redemptive history. They are in the prophesied last days, there's about to be an upheaval in the ordering of the world and Timothy should not be surprised that these false teachings have arisen at this juncture. We can see a similar statement in 2nd Timothy chapter 3 verse 1 but understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.

Jesus had also taught this in the Olivet discourse, in places like Matthew chapter 24 verse 11 for instance, and many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. The false teaching is attributed to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons. The deceitful spirits describe the instigating forces behind these teachings and the teachings of demons describe the teaching in terms of their demonic content.

The teachings are spread by deceitful spirits and their substance arises from demons. These teachings will deceive and lead some astray and the teachings will be spread by persons who have been compromised, insincere liars whose consciences have been seared. The content of these false teachings are described in verse 3, forbidding of marriage and requiring abstinence from foods.

We might speculate here about the exact nature of these teachings, something more than just observance of Jewish kosher laws seems to be involved here, nor does this

seem to be like the situation Paul tackled in Corinth, a matter of eating food sacrificed to idols. Paul had already made his views on that matter clear. Considering the other teachings that seem to have been spread in Ephesus, it may be that what Paul was dealing with here was a sort of Hellenized Jewish asceticism, a form of asceticism based upon Jewish myths that had developed within a Greek cultural context.

Perhaps they looked back to the pre-fall state, prior to man's eating of meat and prior to a situation where men and women had sexual relations, or perhaps the teaching was developed in the context of the new creation, where there would no longer be marriage or giving in marriage, and where meat-eating would presumably cease. Paul addresses these issues by alluding back to the book of Genesis and the teaching there. In Genesis chapter 1 verse 29 for instance, man was given the privilege of eating of every tree and of every plant, and in Genesis chapter 9 verse 3, man was explicitly given the right to eat of the animals too.

The foods were created by God and they were created to be received with thanksgiving. An appropriate response to God's good gifts is to enjoy them and give thanks. In Romans chapter 14 verse 14, Paul makes clear that he does not believe that anything created by God is unclean in itself.

I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. This is why reception of these gifts needs to be with belief, with knowledge of the truth, and with thanksgiving. If things can't be received in that manner, they aren't being received as gifts and can't be properly enjoyed.

The statement that all of these things are good again alludes back to Genesis chapter 1 verse 31, and God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good. Creation can be misused, it can be used in a way that's not of faith or knowledge of the truth. It can also be used in an ungrateful manner.

God's good gifts can be perverted and wrongly received and where they are being perverted or misused in such a manner, we must abstain. However, the gifts as given by God are good things and any suggestion that abstinence from good gifts makes you a holier person should be viewed with great suspicion. God's good gifts are made holy by the word of God, perhaps this is the word of the gospel, or perhaps the word of Christ by which all things were declared clean, or perhaps the word of the scripture more generally, or maybe something else.

Prayer is also mentioned here, prayer presumably thanksgiving. Perhaps prayers at meal times are particularly in view here. Timothy needs to instruct the Ephesians in these matters.

It is in such a manner that he will acquit himself well as a servant of Christ Jesus,

demonstrating his knowledge of the content of the Christian faith and of the good and sound doctrine that stands opposed to the false teaching of the opponents in Ephesus. Once again he is warned against the irreverent silly myths. The myths in question are not godly and Paul also regards them as fundamentally theologically unserious, unworthy of regard.

He more literally characterises them as old women's fables, the sort of superstitious legends that would be spread by people without training in the law. As an alternative to this, Timothy must train himself for godliness. Athletic imagery is introduced at this point and Paul fills it out by contrasting godliness with bodily training.

The sort of rigorous physical training that an athlete might undergo in preparation for an event has purpose and value, yet its value is exceedingly limited compared to the value of godliness. Physical training can increase the potential of the body in this life, but godliness prepares us for this life and the life to come. It has value in every way.

It deals with the comprehensive character of human existence, not just the physical body. Paul underlines this point in verse 9. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. This is a formula that we have already encountered a couple of times in the book.

By comparing and contrasting rigorous physical training and training in godliness, Paul encourages Timothy and us to regard godliness as a discipline that we should take every bit as seriously as an athlete takes bodily exercise. It is something that must become the overriding focus of our lives. We must give ourselves to deliberate practice, not just passively coasting along, but in a determined fashion, devoting ourselves to disciplines that will increase our spiritual capacity.

The Christian's existence must be a lifelong growth in the practice of discipleship, learning the disciplines of prayer, of the reading of the scriptures, of the works of mercy, of integrity in speech and practice, of service within the body of Christ. Filling out Paul's analogy, we might think of the church as a spiritual gymnasium where many people are training together, pushing each other to greater heights, training each other in the disciplines by which they will increase their strength. The good pastor should be like a coach, training Christians in spiritual disciplines, encouraging and exhorting them to keep on going, providing them with an example to aspire to, and holding them accountable for failure.

Paul teaches that all of this is done because we have set our hope on the living God. The living God is the source of life, and committing ourselves to godliness is something that we do because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the source of our present life and our life in the age to come. Paul speaks of God as the saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.

Here our minds should be drawn back to 1 Timothy 2 verses 3 and 4. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our saviour, who desires all people to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. By speaking of God as the saviour of all people, Paul is likely referring to the comprehensive character of God's salvation. It addresses the situation of the whole world, it is offered to every single person.

The statement that follows, however, qualifies it, particularly of those who believe. It is by belief that this general salvation is received. While God's salvation is addressed to all mankind, it is only those who receive Christ by faith that actually enjoy it.

Nevertheless, there are numerous blessings of Christ's rule that are enjoyed even by those who never respond to the gospel. Paul charges Timothy to command and to teach these things. In commanding, he would lay them down as authoritative teaching that must order the life of the church.

In teaching them, he would explain the rationale, and he would instruct people in how to understand them. Timothy's confidence might have been shaken by the fact that he was relatively young, being sent as Paul's representative to a church where there will be many people who are older than him. This is one of the junctures in the book of 1 Timothy, where the question of when the book was written is of some consequence.

If the book of 1 Timothy was written in the window of time of Acts 20 verses 1-3, then Timothy may have been in his early twenties. If it was written after Paul's Roman imprisonment at the end of the book of Acts, then Timothy would likely have been at least in his mid-thirties. We see a similar statement in 1 Corinthians 16 verses 10-11.

When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am. So let no one despise him. Help him on his way in peace, that he may return to me, for I am expecting him with the brothers.

Timothy is instructed to provide an example to the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity. In his speech he would need to show wisdom and mastery. In his conduct he would need to show the integrity between the message that he declared and the actions that he performed.

In love he would show his devotion to Christ and to his people. In faith he would demonstrate his confidence in the word and person of Christ. And in purity his chaste behaviour, particularly towards women.

Perhaps in the purity we also have another reference to the integrity that he needs to show. In 1 Corinthians 4 verse 17 Paul describes Timothy as his son who represents his own character. Paul imitates Christ, he calls the Corinthians to imitate him, and he gives them Timothy who has imitated him.

That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you

of my ways in Christ as I teach them everywhere in every church. As a good leader Timothy needs to lead by example. He needs to be an exemplar of the sort of behaviour that the Christian needs to exhibit.

To this end, until Paul returns, Timothy is instructed to devote himself to the public reading of scripture. This is the fundamental practice of the church, the corporate reading of the scripture and study of it. That leads then to the practice of exhortation that takes the word of the scripture and gives it an imperative force in the life of the congregation.

And then the second practice of teaching by which people are instructed so that they might better understand what they hear in the public reading of the scripture. Timothy had received a gift by which he would be better able to perform the ministry that had been given to him. The gift here is associated with an act of prophecy and also with the laying on of hands.

Elsewhere in 2 Timothy chapter 1 verse 6 we read of another event of laying on of hands when Paul laid hands on Timothy. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. Whether these were two different events of the laying on of hands or the same one is not immediately clear.

I believe it is most likely that the laying on of the hands of the elders might have been the Ephesian house church leaders appointing Timothy to act in a temporary overseer role over them. While Paul's laying of hands on Timothy was appointing Timothy to act as his apostolic plenipotentiary emissary. Timothy has been authorised to perform a mission.

He has also presumably been empowered by the spirit and exhorted and encouraged by a prophecy given concerning him. He must devote himself to performing what he has been given. It is only in performing such a vocation that the gift will actually be enjoyed and be rendered effective.

To do this like the effective athlete he must continually practice these things. He must immerse himself in them. It must become his entire world.

It must be what he lives and breathes every single day. As he does this he will be a more effective example. People will see the progress that he is making and he will thereby inspire them to make progress in their own Christian lives.

Timothy's primary focus must be keeping watch upon himself. By keeping watch upon himself and by practicing his own Christian life he will be the most effective leader that he can be. In many ways the most effective shepherd of a community is the person who watches more closely over himself than over anyone else.

He masters himself and sets an example for others thereby. He sets the tone for the

entire community. Leadership will always be a lot easier when you are giving people something worth following and the man who is keeping close watch over himself will be in the best position to do this.

Likewise he also needs to be diligent and watchful over what he is teaching. It is the truth that he lives and teaches that will be effective in saving himself and the various people to whom he ministers. A question to consider.

How might Paul's analogy between the Christian life and athletic training inform our models and our practices of Christian discipleship?