# **‘STEP UP – STAND OUT’**

## Introduction/Context

The world, our country and our community need us to be counter-cultural,

living the Christian life in a secular society – at work, at school, in our neighbourhoods, and at home. We are called to **step up** and to **stand out**.

The opportunity of Covenant Sunday each year reminds us of our need to continually rely on God and to allow his Holy Spirit to have more impact on the whole of our lives. The invitation to respond to God’s covenantal promises is available to all. This is not an exclusive offer available for certain people or dependent on how long you have been a Christian, or if you have entered into a covenant with God in any capacity before. This is an offer and an opportunity for everyone.

Therefore Covenant Sunday gives us – as friends, adherents, soldiers and officers – the opportunity to answer the call from God to live in a distinctive, covenanted relationship with him. It helps us learn what we need to put in place in order to step up and stand out. We should feel emboldened to live in a courageous and committed way – not just on Covenant Sunday but in the days, weeks and months ahead.

This teaching helps to unpack the key verses from 1 Timothy 4 and subsequent verses.

## Part 1 - What is Covenant?

A covenant is totally different from a contract.

* A contract is a formal agreement between two parties where each party has a responsibility, and if one party does not carry out their responsibility the contract is invalid – eg a property contractor and a householder.
* Conversely, a covenant is a personal promise that someone makes because of a commitment to another person. It is not about looking for a benefit from that other person.
* Our covenant with God may have come from a soldier’s or officer’s covenant, but it also includes the commitments and promises we have made to God throughout our faith journey as believers.

The key Scripture passage for this Covenant Sunday is 1 Timothy 4:7-8

*‘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.’ (ESV)*

* God needs you and me to courageously **step up and stand out** for him in our own settings – whether that’s the corps, a workplace, school, the community or family.
* We must open ourselves to God’s work in our lives and be willing to undergo training so we can become the people he intends us to be. This takes courage!
* We all have growing to do – we haven’t made it yet! Part of our calling to step up and stand out means training ourselves to live in a godly and committed way.
* Living in covenant with God requires intentional training of the heart and mind, fostering spiritual discipline and a deep commitment to faith.

## Part 2 - Holy Living

Paul guides his young colleague Timothy about godliness in the verses in chapter 4.

Verses 10-15 form the basis for the specifics of the teaching/sermon, and also the response which individuals can make, in their response to God, to step up and stand out.

***Verse 12 (ESV)*** *- ‘set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity’*

* We are called to set an example in many ways – the way we act, speak, and live out faith.
* This means speaking wholesome words of power and truth, and acting in ways which honour God.
* Setting an example of love, faith and purity means demonstrating the importance of loving your enemies through the power of the Holy Spirit, and modelling deep-rooted faith and holy living.
* Illustration – The coffee spill
  + If someone bumps into you while you’re holding a cup of coffee, the thing that spills is coffee, not something else. This happens not because of the bump, but because the coffee is what was inside the cup.
  + Similarly, when we face challenges or are ‘bumped’ in life in moments of pressure or challenge, what comes out of us reflects our true inner contents. Our reactions in difficult situations reveal our inner thoughts, emotions and values. This serves as a reminder to cultivate what we want to overflow in our lives – love, patience and kindness – so that when we face bumps along the way, we respond in a way that aligns with our promises to God.

***Verse 13 (ESV)*** *- ‘devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.’*

* ‘Devote yourself’ – be bold and be totally committed to what God is calling you to do.
  + Example – A committed sports fan will spend money and time following their heroes. They will study them and speak confidently and openly about them.
* Are we studying and courageously speaking openly about God?
* The example used here is of Sir John Boyd (but feel free to insert an example that may be relevant or known to your congregation).
  + ***[[1]](#footnote-1)***Sir John Boyd stepped up and stood out as a disciple in his service for God in both corps and professional life.
  + After being invited to The Salvation Army as a boy, he was aware of the challenges his community faced. While starting a career as an apprentice at a steel company, he also worked to set up an outpost for young people on a housing estate which was attended by over 150 children.
  + John spent his career in the trade union movement, speaking truth and justice into Government. He fought for improvement of conditions for workers in accordance with his beliefs as a Salvationist, and continued active service within his various corps.
  + When John was awarded the Order of the Founder, the citation stated that he had ‘*a distinguished public career in trade union affairs, which has led to royal recognition, [and he has] given exemplary local officer service. His forthright salvationism has been expressed both in public service and private life.’*
  + How does Sir John Boyd’s story inspire you to courageously and boldly live out your faith?

***Verse 14 (ESV)*** *– ‘Do not neglect the gift you have’*

* All those who are saved are given at least one spiritual gift by God – for the purpose of building up the body of Christ. They are available to all.
* Take time to find out what spiritual giftings you have and how you can use them in your setting.
* An example of bravely embracing giftings is found in the testimony of the divisional leaders in Ukraine and how they are engaging in service throughout the horrors of war. Below is a short extract. Their full testimony can be found on the Covenant Sunday webpage.

‘From the first waves of the full-scale war, we, together with all the officers, opened corps buildings, our homes, and became centres for helping refugees. The Salvation Army provided shelter, fed, clothed, provided first aid, psychological and spiritual aid. Despite the terrible panic and danger, not a single officer of The Salvation Army of Ukraine gave up his service, but on the contrary, they began to carry out their service as Salvationists with even greater determination. During these terrible war days, Ukrainian people saw The Salvation Army boldly fulfilling its mission …. We realise that our officers need to have an example for imitation, inspiration. Therefore, we make every effort to demonstrate the good example of the Saviour. We call to be courageous soldiers of Christ.

***Verse 15 –*** ‘Practise these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress’

* Cultivate yourself and engage in training for holy living to refine your craft.
* Example – Just as a craftsperson hones their skills and creates ever more beautiful works, we too must practise and train ourselves to demonstrate our spiritual growth.
* What do we immerse ourselves with? Are we focusing on the wrong things – work, social media etc?
* Growth in our discipleship, and relationship with God, requires us to go into training and develop ourselves further, despite pressures of the world and other things fighting for our attention.

## Part 3 – The Challenge

What is God saying to you that he wants to challenge you on?

* ***Is it speech?*** – How do we respond when others don’t speak to us in a Godly way? What about how we courageously tell others about Jesus?
* ***Are there parts of our behaviour*** that God needs to control? Are we addicted to something so much that it interferes with our spiritual life?
* ***Can we stand firm in our faith*** despite pressures from the world? We might be called to serve as officers, to become a local leader, or step up to something new, but we don’t want to go. Do we have the courage and faith to follow where Jesus leads?
* ***Are we devoting ourselves and nurturing our gifts?*** Where are we focusing our time and energy in order to train ourselves for a holy life?
* ***Are there areas of our personal life which we know are not wholly devoted to God?*** Does God need to come into that part of our lives and take control?

Pray that God will reveal what he is calling us to focus on. Pray also that, by his grace, we may boldly become more like him, and step up to the task and stand out for him.

1. A précis from *Congress Biographies, Sir John Boyd CBE, FRSA, OF* by Lieut-Colonel Gordon Sharp. SP&S Ltd. The Salvation Army 1983 ISBN 0 85412 416 0 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)