

2 Timothy 2:20-22 — How Can I Be Useful For God?

February 28, 2021

Does anyone want to be useful to God in this life? Does anyone want to be a man or woman that God uses to do something special for Christ and his kingdom in this world? That is my heart's desire. I hope it is also your heart's desire. I think all of us want to be used by God to make a difference for Christ and his kingdom in this world.

What should we do to put ourselves in a position where we can be used by God? That is what we are talking about this morning. If you have a Bible, take it out. I don't care if you use a phone Bible or paper Bible. Turn to 2 Timothy 2:20. As a church, we are studying through 2 Timothy. Today, we are studying 2 Timothy 2:20-22. As I read those verses aloud, follow along by silently reading the verses with me in your own Bible.

Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. 2 Timothy 2:20–22 (ESV)

Last week, in the prior verses, Paul taught us how to evaluate a pastor. Paul gave us a metaphor for how we are to think of a pastor. A pastor is like a workman, a craftsman. Pastors are workmen in the Word of God. Their job is to faithfully teach and apply God's Word for the people. Pastors are to be careful craftsmen. They don't want to be ashamed of their work in the Word. As Paul said, they are to cut the Word straight.

This morning Paul gives us another metaphor of what good pastors, and good Christians, look like. They are similar to an honorable vessel. That means a useful vessel that is ready for any good work.

The three verses we read break into three points that teach us about what it means for us to be useful vessels in the hand of God. The first verse presents the analogy and explains how Christians in the church are like household objects. The second verse begins applying this analogy. It shows us choices we need to make to be useful to God. The third verse applies this in an even more practical way by showing us the kind of character we need to avoid and the kind of character we need to pursue to put ourselves in a position to be useful for God in this world.

Household objects teach us about our usefulness for God.

Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. 2 Timothy 2:20 (ESV)

Paul spoke about a large house. In a large house, there are many vessels. The word vessel is a very generic term. That is appropriate because the Greek term it represents is a very broad term. It means anything in the house that is used for domestic purposes. If you were moving, it is anything you would put in the moving van. It is the dinner plates, the silverware, the drinking glasses and even the trash cans. Paul said a large house has many different furnishings. Some of them are expensive and are used for important tasks. They are made of gold and silver. They are valuable, expensive and beautiful. They are put on display in the china cabinet. Others are made for common tasks. They are made

of wood or clay. They are like disposable paper cups. They are useful, but they are not that valuable.

Paul focused this analogy in the next description. Some household objects are used for honorable tasks while others are used for dishonorable tasks. An honorable task is the role the china plays when a guest comes over to the home. Those dishes have a treasured and valuable role. A dishonorable task done in the home is the role the cat scoop plays to clean out the litter box. The cat box scoop is not something you get out for your guests. You hide it!

So, you have fancy furnishings and common furnishings. You use some items in the house used for honorable tasks while other items in the house are not that useful or honorable. They are used for dishonorable tasks.

What was Paul depicting in this analogy? I think the first clue we need comes from 1 Timothy where Paul called the church the household of God.

...if I delay, you may know [how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.](#) 1 Timothy 3:15 (ESV)

The church is the household of God. The church is the pillar and foundation of the truth in this world.

In the church, we are the vessels in God's house. As Christians, some of us are in a position to be an honorable and useful vessel for the master of the house while others of us are in a less useful and presentable position because we are dirty and need some cleaning.

In the verse prior to this analogy, which is where we finished last week, Paul spoke about the importance of Christians not just trusting in Jesus and

being saved by our faith but the importance of living a holy life as a result of our saving faith.

But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity." 2 Timothy 2:19 (ESV)

The analogy of the honorable and dishonorable vessels in verse 20 picks up on this thought. In the church, people should live holy lives because of Jesus. *The degree of holiness in our lives will determine the degree of our usefulness for God in this life. Holiness before God leads to usefulness to God.*

In the church, some people are very much like Jesus. They are similar to the gold and silver vessels in the master's house. Jesus is eager to use those vessels. He is proud to use those vessels. Others are less like Jesus. They are content to live in sin. They are the wood and pottery vessels.

It is the vessels who have addressed sin issues in their lives that are washed and ready to be used by God. It is those who are not addressing sin issues that are like dirty dishes in the sink. They need to get cleaned up to be in a position to be useful to the master.

Paul said we need to realize the church is a mixed bag. It has some people in it whose lives will be more useful to God than others. Even though we are forgiven by Jesus, the practical holiness of our lives will determine our usefulness for Jesus. You cannot be a dirty dish in the sink and be used to serve a nice meal. A dish needs to be cleaned up before it can be used again.

It goes without saying that all of us want to be a clean and useful vessel. The next verse tells us more about how we can put ourselves in that clean and useful position.

When I cleanse myself from sin, I put myself in a position to be useful to God.

Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. 2 Timothy 2:21 (ESV)

How do we put ourselves in a position to be used by God? Paul said if someone cleanses himself or herself from what is dishonorable, that person will be a vessel for honorable use. If you wash the dishes, you can now use the dishes. Paul said to Timothy, and to use, if we want God to use us, if there are issues of sin in our lives we must not content ourselves to hide them and tolerate them, we must address them and repent of them.

If you have a questionable relationship taking place with someone of the opposite sex either in person or on the Internet, that needs to be repented of and turned away from. If you tolerate that inappropriate relationship, you are not in a position for God to use you to advance his kingdom. There is dirt on your dish that needs to come off.

If you are watching porn online, that is an issue you need to face and address. Porn is not just sin that will destroy your relationship with the opposite sex and your marriage but it will destroy your usefulness for Christ. It is dirt on your dish. God will not use you in a significant way to advance his kingdom until it is addressed.

If you are harboring bitterness or unforgiveness against someone, that needs to be dealt with. You need to forgive him or her. You need to let the hurt go and put it at the feet of Jesus. Forgive that person like Jesus forgave you. If you choose to not forgive and hold onto the hurt, you will turn yourself into a bitter

person. Holding onto the hurt and not forgiving will put you in a position where God will not choose to use you to advance his kingdom.

Some of you know I am part of an Iron Man group at church. We are four men that gather once a week to hold one another accountable for memorizing one verse a week. My memory verse for this week was on the importance of forgiveness. Let me read it to you.

Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, "I repent," you must forgive him. Luke 17:3–4 (ESV)

God is incredibly forgiving toward us. As Christians, we are to be known for being incredibly forgiving to others. We are to forgive others repeatedly. We are to forgive them again and again as soon as they repent and ask to be forgiven. Why are we to be so forgiving? We are to forgive that much because that is the way Jesus forgives us. If we sin seven times in a day and repent of the same sin seven times in a day, Jesus completely forgives us. He doesn't hold it over our heads. That is how we are to forgive other people, with the same amount of crazy forgiveness Jesus shows to us.

When I cleanse myself from sinful Christian influence, I put myself in a position to be useful to God.

In this context, there is one a particular type of defilement Paul talked about. It is not what you would expect. Timothy needed to separate himself from false teachers, such as Hyamaneus and Philetus. If Timothy continued to associate with them and fraternize with them, their corrupt teaching would have begun to influence him. Timothy needed to separate himself from those false

teachers. He needed to encourage the people in the church of Ephesus to do the same.

Watch out for the danger of doctrinal deviation.

Before we get too far into this point, I should point out that doctrinal deviation always leads to lifestyle deviation. Corrupt teaching about Jesus will lead to a corrupt lifestyle not lived for Jesus. This is why you always find corrupt Bible teachers living greedy, scandalous lives that are mired in sin. They always go together.

If you find a denomination that has a low view of the Bible, doesn't take the Bible literally and feels free to reinterpret passages that make them uncomfortable, I guarantee you will find corrupt lifestyles that go with its corrupted faith. There are denominations today that have a low view of the Bible, and you find them supporting homosexual marriage, helping to fund the LGBTQ movement and supporting Planned Parenthood. How could a denomination help fund abortions? It is simple. A corrupted faith will always lead to a corrupted life. Keeping your finger in the text of Scripture and submitting to the Bible as your authority leads to a holy and pure life. Paul talked about this with Timothy in his previous letter to him.

If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. 1 Timothy 6:3–5 (ESV)

The sounds words of our Lord Jesus accord with godliness, that is results in godliness. Those who do not agree with the sounds words of Jesus will have a lifestyle of quarrels, controversy, envy, slander, and constant friction.

So, doctrinal deviation will lead to lifestyle deviation. Paul told Timothy, and he us, to be careful how closely you associate yourself people who have corrupted beliefs about Jesus. They will draw you away from Jesus. Let's look at the danger of a corrupted lifestyle a little more.

Watch out for the danger of lifestyle deviation.

You might ask, "Where in this verse do we find a command to separate ourselves from those who are engaged in corrupt truth or corrupt living?" The Greek doesn't translate into English particularly smoothly. There is also an alternate way of translating the reading of this passage that is highlighted in the footnote in your Bible.

If you look at the ESV text and the footnote on this passage, it says:

...if anyone cleanses himself from ("what is dishonorable" or "from these things"), he will be a vessel for honorable use... 2 Timothy 2:21 (ESV)

The question is, "What are these things? What are the dishonorable things?"

The NIV translates this verse this way.

Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes... 2 Timothy 2:21 (NIV)

I didn't pick this up when I was reading this our English Bibles, but some commentators point out this is referring back to what came before this analog --- the false teaching of Hymanaeus and Philetus.

Paul told Timothy to not just clean the sin out of his life but to separate himself from those who claimed to be Christians but were not living the Christian life. If Timothy spent too much time with the Hymanaeuses and Philetuses of the world and didn't choose to separate himself from them, soon he would have started having corrupted beliefs about Jesus like them and he would have had a corrupted lifestyle like them. What does this look like in our lives?

This reminded me what it was like when I went to college. I went to a public high school but a Christian college. I was super excited about Christian college because I thought it was like a massive high school church youth group. I enjoyed a good high school youth group. It didn't take long to realize that many of the guys in the dorm claimed the name of Christ but were not interested in living for Christ. I needed to create relational distance between my life and their lives.

For instance, just down the hall were two kids whose parents were missionaries in Africa. It didn't take long for them to get in trouble for growing weed in flower pots in their dorm room window. I needed to create relational distance from them because I didn't want to start becoming like them.

Then there was the first weekend I was at college. Some of the upper classmen on the floor invited me and other freshman guys to go to a midnight movie. They told us it was a comedy. I was completely ignorant and let them purchase the tickets. In my house, we didn't go to movies so this was a new experience. They didn't take us to a comedy. They took us to a horror movie. It was disgusting. I seriously didn't sleep through the night for two days. I soon

realized these were not like the guys in my high school youth group. They named the name of Jesus, but they were not interested in living for Jesus. I needed to create some distance between my life and their lives. I didn't want to become like them over time. It would ruin my thought life, and as we know from these verses, it would put me in a position where I was not useful for God because I would have been like a dirty dish in the sink. Until I repented of that kind of lifestyle, I was not in a position to be useful to God.

This week, as I was reading my Bible, I ran across these verses in 1 Corinthians. Paul was talking about something similar to what we find here in 2 Timothy.

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 1 Corinthians 5:9–11 (ESV)

Paul was more concerned about the type of people Christians hung around with in the church than the type of people Christians hung around with in the world. People who do know Jesus, you should know what to expect when it comes to their behavior.

When Christians hang out with other Christians who are guilty of sexual immorality, they begin to develop a low view of sexual morality. I have talked with Christian teenagers about this. Even though they knew about the importance of sexual purity, because their other friends were involved in premarital sex, they became involved in premarital sex. They thought everybody was doing it!

Sexual immorality translates from the Greek word porneia, which is where we get our English word pornography. It means any sexual expression outside of marriage --- premarital or extramarital. That is not the way a Christian lives. If Christians hang out with other people who claim the name of Christ but have low sexual morals, they will find themselves drawn in that direction.

The same is true for the issue of greed. A greedy person is someone more in love with money than with God. If we hang out with Christians like that, we will become like that. The same is true for an idolater. Idolatry is worshipping anything like it is a god instead of our one true God. Today, for some people, football is their idol. Their sports cars are their idols. Their boats are their idols. A job can be an idol. A boyfriend can be an idol. If we develop a close friendship with someone who claims the name of Christ but is worshipping football instead of Christ, it is easy to become just like them and draw away from Jesus.

The same is true for reviling. That is having an insulting or slanderous tongue. Don't hang out with people who are constantly insulting people and cutting others down, even if they claim to be Christians. That kind of lifestyle is catching. Soon we will be imitating it. This is why Paul said not to hang out with someone who claims to be a Christian but gets drunk all the time. Before you know it, you will be worshipping your beer instead of Jesus. The same is true for a swindler. That is someone who is greedy and uses his or her greed to take advantage of other people and their misfortune. Paul said to not even eat with Christians who are living that way. That is not an acceptable Christian lifestyle. If we hang too close to them, it won't take long until we start becoming like them.

Not only will we become like them over time but we will put ourselves in the position of being dirty dishes in the sink of God's house. We are not in a position to be used by God because there are sin issues we need to address.

Look what Paul said about carefully considering with whom we associate ourselves as Christians.

Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." 1 Corinthians 15:33 (ESV)

If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. 2 Thessalonians 3:14 (ESV)

See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled... Hebrews 12:15 (ESV)

Have you spent time around a bitter person? Bitterness is a catchy attitude. It doesn't take long until everyone is griping and whining. If someone is a bitter person, identify the attitude to him or her and let that person know you cannot hang out with him or her because his or her bitterness is not good for you and your faith.

What are the benefits of cleansing ourselves of sin and separating ourselves from those who call themselves Christians but are living sinful lifestyles?

When I cleanse myself from sinful influence, I become a vessel for honorable use.

Paul reminded us that when we address sin issues in our lives, we become not just clean vessels but honorable vessels. God is delighted to not just keep us in the cabinet when we address issues of sin in our lives but he delights in using us in great ways for him. It doesn't take long. If we address issues of

sinfulness and pursue holiness, this opens the door to honorableness and usefulness for Christ and his kingdom. It is a good future that is held in front of us, a future of being used in great ways for Christ and his kingdom by pursuing holiness and rejecting persistent issues of sinfulness.

When I cleanse myself from sinful influence, I become useful to the master.

Being useful to the master means we become tools God grabs for his purposes and uses for his purposes, not just once but again and again.

If you are like me, you have a toolbox in the garage. I have a variety of tools in my toolbox, most of them purchased for home projects. I have one tool in my toolbox that is a massive round circular drill bit. I needed it to put a hole in the floor of my laundry room floor for a dryer vent exit. Thirteen years ago, when I purchased it, I remember thinking this is probably the only time I will need a drill bit that big and until I die it will just sit in my toolbox taking up valuable space. Thirteen years later, it is still sitting in my toolbox. There is nothing wrong with it, but it is not a useful tool.

In my toolbox I also have a DeWalt power drill. I keep it on the top of my toolbox because I use it all the time. I am convinced it is one of the best inventions known to man. It is much better than putting screws in by hand.

Paul said that when we address issues of sin in our lives that we have been tolerating and have been hindering our usefulness to God for growing his kingdom, what we will find is suddenly there is a change in our lives as God is quick to use us. He is eager to use us. God will start putting us in situations where people need to hear the gospel. He will put us around people who need to

be encouraged in Christ. He will put us around people that need to be prayed for and loved on. Address issues of hidden sin in our lives and sinful relational influences in our lives and God will be eager to use us. We will become the tools God grabs again and again when he has work to do in people's lives for Christ and his kingdom. That is the kind of person I want to be. That is the kind of person you want to be. What an amazing and exciting future is in front of us when we address issues of sin and become clean, honorable, and useful vessels in the hands of Jesus our master.

When I cleanse myself from sinful influence, I am ready for every good work.

Speaking of household items, I am a DIY guy. If I can do it myself instead of paying somebody, I go for it. I love to save money, and I love the adventure. It has taken me a while, but I am now a DIY guy when it comes to fertilizing my lawn. It took me a while to purchase my own fertilizer spreader but once I purchased it, I became fussy about it, especially after watching enough YouTube videos to learn about it. For instance, I learned you never put the fertilizer spreader away dirty. The fertilizer is corrosive and will corrode the gates, wires and any exposed steel. After using it, you must wash it. If you have a steel fertilizer spreader, you need to repaint any place the paint has rubbed off and the steel is exposed or it will start rusting. The last trick I learned came from a YouTube video. That is you spray Pam on the cable and gates as a last step. That thin oil coating protects the steel from the moisture in the air and keeps it from oxidizing so the next time you grab your fertilizer spreader it is ready to go and just as nice as the day you brought it home from the store.

Paul said to Timothy and to us, we want to be like that fertilizer spreader. We don't want to be sitting dirty on the shelf. We don't want to be a dirty dish in the sink of God's house that can't be used until it is cleaned. We want to be ready to go when God needs us and wants us to play an important role in advancing his kingdom. Let's be the man or woman ready to go, the one God is eager to grab when he has work to do in this world when it comes to advancing Christ's kingdom.

Practical purity means running from sinful things and running to godly things.

So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. 2 Timothy 2:22 (ESV)

At this point, Paul moved from the metaphor of being clean vessels that are useful to the master in God's house, to some practical instructions on character and what kind of person we should pursue becoming in Christ so we are increasingly useful for Christ. Paul told Timothy there were some things he needed to run from and some things he needed to run toward.

Run from youthful passions.

Paul told us to flee youthful passions. The word flee, is the Greek *pheugo*. This is where we get our English word fugitive. It means to run away from something. If you saw the Harrison Ford movie Fugitive, you know that movie was about Harrison Ford running away to save his life. This is the same concept. There are some things we need to run from if we want to be a man or woman that is useful to God. What are we to run from? We are to run from youthful passions.

When we hear “flee youthful passions,” we tend to think of this sexually. Stay away from sexual promiscuity. Running from sexual promiscuity is part of what Paul was talking about when he talked about fleeing youthful passions but it is not all of what he meant by this simple phrase. Let’s briefly talk about the sexual part of this phrase.

In the Bible, every time it talks about facing sexual temptation, it always instructs us to run. We are not to negotiate with sexual temptation. We are not to tolerate sexual temptation. We are not to lie to ourselves and think we will not go too far in sexual temptation. Every time the Bible talks about sexual temptation it tells us to immediately run from it as soon as we begin facing it. If we spend time tantalizing ourselves with it, we will give into it. This is what Joseph did when Mrs. Potiphar was chasing him.

...she caught him by his garment, saying, “Lie with me.” But he left his garment in her hand and fled and got out of the house. Genesis 39:12 (ESV)

This is what Paul instructed the Corinthians to do when they were sexually tempted.

Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. 1 Corinthians 6:18 (ESV)

So when we find ourselves facing youthful passions, especially sexual ones, don’t play with them. Run from them or you will entice yourself and give into them.

In this context, Paul had much more than sexual lusts in mind. The way he generalized the term youthful passions means he was always talking about other leadership and character issues that often beset young leaders. He was talking

about things like pride, arrogance, anger. Run away from being that kind of leader. Your other young friends may be that kind of leader but don't you become one. We will dive into this verse more next week but look how Paul gave examples of a young leader's fatal character flaws in the next verse. These are the type of things we are to run from and avoid in our character.

And the Lord's servant must not be **quarrelsome** but kind to everyone, able to teach, **patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness...** 2 Timothy 2:24–25 (ESV)

Young men are known for getting into quarrels. They can be known for being hotheads. Run from being that kind of a leader. It will only ruin your usefulness for God. Don't be an impatient leader, especially when enduring evil. Impatience will kill your character and squelch your effectiveness for Christ. Be a gentle leader. Most young men are harsh leaders. Don't go there. Run from that kind of character. It will shut down your effectiveness for Christ in this world.

You can't just run from things. To effectively run from things, you need to run to things, to what should you pursue. Paul gave Timothy, and us, four things to pursue. Before we get to them, let me throw one in that doesn't come from the text but is super important.

Pursue reading the Bible.

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. Psalm 119:9 (ESV)

The best way to purify your life is to keep your finger in the text. I cannot emphasize that strongly enough. God uses the Word of God to create and to sustain spiritual life. God uses the Word of God to identify issues of sin and to break us from from the strange hold of sin.

Just this past week I was talking with someone in my office who began reading the Bible a few years ago and she told me how consistent reading of God's Word revolutionized her life. It brought her to faith. She told me it felt like God opened her eyes to finally see the world and life like he does. Simple daily reading of God's Word revolutionized her life.

This year as a church, we have the Take Up and Read Challenge. I am challenging the church family to join us in month-long commitments to read a book of the Bible per month. For February, we just finished reading the Gospel of Luke. Monday is March 1. For March, we are reading through the book of Genesis. I invite you to join your church family in reading the book of Genesis. The challenge is only five days a week. We have two days on the weekend to catch up if you fall behind. All of us use those catchup days. March has 25 work days in it. Genesis has 50 chapters. If we read two chapters of Genesis five days a week, we will finish the book in a month.

In the interest of pursuing rightness, holiness, and usefulness, will you join me in reading the book of Genesis this month?

Let's look at the specifics of what Paul told Timothy, and us, to pursue when it comes to our character that will enhance our usefulness for Christ and his kingdom in this world.

Pursue active righteousness.

This simply means to do what we know is right by God's standards. It means that if we read God's Word, we obey God's Word. If we know what is right, we do what is right. This doesn't simply mean avoiding what is sinful. It

means going out of our way to do what is right. This covers both active and passive righteousness. Passive righteousness is easy. It means we don't steal from - but we pay when we leave the grocery store. I think most of us have that one covered. Active righteousness is much harder. It takes initiative. It means going out of our way to do what is right. For example, the Bible tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Following that command usually involves active righteousness, not passive righteousness. Let me show you what I mean.

This past week, a friend of mine told me something he saw happen in a grocery store this past Christmas. He was in the checkout line and an elderly lady was in front of him paying for her groceries. As the checker came to the end of her items, the elderly lady reached behind her and grabbed a gift card. She asked the cashier to put \$100 on the card. The checker was having a tough day. She was tired. It was Christmas. She had a hard time getting the gift card to load. When it finally rang up in the register, she apologetically gave it to the elderly woman because it took her so long to ring up.

The old lady took the card from her hand. She held it for a second. Then she said, "Here...it is for you." She gave it back to the checker and walked out the door with her groceries. That is active righteousness. That is going out of your way to love your neighbor as yourself.

Paul told us that if we are a person who pursues righteousness in our character, if we are the kind of person that goes out of our way to love on our neighbors and bless our neighbors, God will start opening up doors of usefulness for Christ and his kingdom right in front of us. Active righteousness opens door of

opportunity for advancing Christ and his kingdom. Paul told Timothy and us, to pursue being that kind of person.

Pursue faithfulness in our character.

When Paul told Timothy to pursue faith, in this context, he was not talking about faith as the essence of belief. He was talking about faith in our character. A person of faithful character is a loyal person, a trustworthy person, a faithful person. Pursue the character of being a faithful, trustworthy, loyal person and you put yourself in a position where God will begin to use you as part of his plan to change people's lives.

Who do you have that you would call you a 2 a.m. friend? A 2 a.m. friend is the person you call when life falls apart. It is the person you call when you realize you might lose your job. It is the person you would call if a family member was diagnosed with cancer. It is the person you call when life falls apart.

I will tell you who your 2 a.m. friends are. They are the people who have been the most faithful, trustworthy, and loyal to you in life. Paul told Timothy, and us, to pursue being that kind of person. Pursue being faithful, trustworthy, and loyal to people around you. You will be a vessel that is useful in the master's hand. God will open gospel doors of opportunity for men and women who pursue faithfulness in their character.

Pursue love in our actions.

In English, we have one word for love. We use it for everything. We love the meat we smoke on our grills and we love our spouses. Hopefully, we do not love our spouses and the meat we smoke on our grills the same way. In English,

the word love covers many different things. In Greek, there are different words for love to cover different kinds of love. When Paul tells us to pursue love, the word he used to talk about love in this passage is the word *agape*. That is called love of choice. It when you choose to love someone or something even though there is nothing lovely about it and there is nothing that attracts you to it.

All of us have people in our lives that are hard to love. All of us have people in our lives that do not attract us, that do not energize us. For some of us who are younger, it is the people with gray hair that are hard to love. Nothing attracts you to them, so at church you avoid them. For others of us who have gray hair, it is the young people that are easy to avoid because you can't relate to their style of music. Paul told Timothy, and us, if you want to put yourself in a position of usefulness to God, pursue loving people, especially the hard-to-love people, especially the people you would like to avoid. Choose to love on them and you will find God opening doors of opportunity for you to be useful for Christ and his kingdom in this world.

Pursue peace in our relationships.

This means harmony and tranquility. This means be a person who is a peacemaker. Be a person that generates harmony, that generates tranquility. This means don't be a person who escalates conflict. Be a person who deescalates conflict. Be known as a peacemaker. It puts you in a position where you are useful to God.

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Proverbs 15:1 (ESV)

Conclusion

Do you want to be useful to God? Do you want to be the man or woman God chooses to use when he has something important he wants done for his kingdom in this world? Do you want to be used by God to make a difference in people's lives? If that is what you want, and I pray that is what we all want, then we need to put ourselves in positions to be most useful for God. We covered eight ways to put ourselves in that position of usefulness.

1. **Clean sin out of my life.** You wouldn't serve a meal to a guest on a dirty dish. A dirty dish is a useless dish until it is clean. The same is true for each of us. If there are hidden areas of sin in your life that the Holy Spirit is prompting you to face this morning, then courageously face those sins. Confess those sins to your spouse or a close, reliable Christian friend, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, cut them out of your life. God uses clean instruments.
2. **Avoid relationships with those who claim the name of Christ but are living opposed to Christ.** Many people name the name of Christ but have little desire to pursue a holy life for Christ. Their lifestyle and attitudes are catchy. You may need to separate yourself from people who claim to love Christ but are living lifestyles that are openly opposed to Christ, such as their engagement in sexual immorality, greed, slander, or idolatry of a hobby or a job. Separating ourselves from those who are pulling us away from Christ in the name of Christ puts us in positions to be useful for Christ.

3. **Run from youthful passions.** That is not just sexual passions but passions such as pride, stubbornness, harshness, criticalness, and quarrelsomeness. That puts us in a position to be useful for God.
4. **Pursue reading my Bible.** Just as important as what we run from is what we run toward. As Psalm 119 tells us, the way we keep a pure life is by reading and following the Word of God. We need it like our daily bread.
5. **Pursue active righteousness.** Don't just avoid what is sinful but go after what is right. Treat people the way you would like to be treated. Take the initiative; love on them by putting your money where your mouth is. That puts you in a position to be useful for God.
6. **Pursue faithfulness in character.** Focus on being a faithful, trustworthy, and loyal person in your relationships with other people. That kind of character opens doors of opportunity for you to be useful for God when you and I become the kind of people that others call at 2 a.m. when their lives fall apart.
7. **We pursue love in our actions.** We choose to love people even when there is nothing lovely about people that attracts them to us. When we choose to love hard-to-love people, just like Jesus chose to love us, because we are hard-to-love people, that puts us in positions where we are useful to God and God opens doors of opportunity in our lives to make a difference in the lives of others.
8. **Pursue peace in our relationships.** When we pursue becoming a person who is skillful in deescalating conflict rather than ramping it up, you will find

God opening doors of opportunity in your life to make a difference in this world for Christ.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne, was a pastor from the 1800s. This is the memorable way he stated the principle we are looking at this morning.

A holy man is an awesome weapon in the hand of God. — Robert Murray M'Cheyne

My prayer is that CrossWinds would be a church filled with men and women who are awesome weapons in the hand of God, men and women that God is eager to grab and use to make a difference for Christ and his kingdom in this world. What unlocks the door to our usefulness is our holiness.

God is not using particularly skillful people in the world to grow his kingdom and make a difference. He is using holy people to grow his kingdom and make a difference.

Holiness in our lives will always lead to usefulness in our lives. May we be holy men and woman that are awesome weapons in the hand of God.



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