

# 'Useful Servants for God'

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[ 0 : 00 ] In life, for things to be useful, they need to be fit for purpose, right? Otherwise, they're not very useful. Like a pair of scissors that's advertised as both right-handed and left-handed scissors, but looks like that.

That's not so useful, is it? Or an electric hammer that looks like this. All it does is heat up the handle. I'm not sure how useful that is.

Or this ride-on lawnmower. It's ride-on, but the thin tie at the back will obviously slip on the grass, and so it's not so useful.

Or this pocket knife, which on the left-hand side has an axe and a hammer, but is literally this big, so not so useful for hammering or chopping wood.

The point is, to be really useful, things need to be fit for purpose. And it's the same when it comes to being useful servants for God. You see, God is God, and so he deserves to be served.

[ 1 : 05 ] What's more, God has graciously given his only son, Jesus, to die for us. And at the cross, to take the punishment for all our sins, so that we who believe in him can go free, forgiven for life eternal.

And so out of a deep gratitude to what God has done for us, we ought to want to serve him in return, oughtn't we? But to be a useful servant, we need to be fit for purpose.

And that's what Paul reminds Timothy in our passage today. You see, Paul, just to recap, is about to die, and he doesn't want the gospel, that's the good news about Jesus, to die with him.

What's more, there are still some false teachers at Timothy's church. And Paul doesn't want the gospel to be altered or perverted by them. And so Paul writes to Tim with the big theme of the letter, as we've seen, to guard the gospel, so that it's not altered by the false teachers, nor die out with Paul.

And so two weeks ago, we saw to guard the gospel, firstly meant for Timothy to not be ashamed of the good news about Jesus. And then last week, James showed us it meant to endure and entrust the gospel to others.

[ 2 : 27 ] And now this week today, it means being a useful servant, servant who is fit for purpose. How? Well, firstly, by being a worker who is approved by God.

So that brings us to point one in your outlines and verse 14 to 15 in your Bibles. Paul writes, Now here, Paul begins in verse 14 by telling Timothy to remind God's people of these things, which begs the question, what things?

Well, the things we heard about last week. You see, a pastor's job is not to remind God's or teach God's people about new things, but to remind them of the same things in God's word.

Because we often forget things, don't we? I like people's names. We can forget people's names all the time. Some of us can even forget our spouse's birthday.

It only happened once for the record. And so let me remind you of what we saw these things last week. We learned last week that we need to be strengthened by God's grace to endure suffering for Jesus.

[ 3 : 55 ] Suffering like a soldier who puts their commanding officer, Jesus, first above civilian affairs, above sport, above work, above even family.

And sometimes that may mean we miss out on things, which is a form of suffering. Or suffering like an athlete that comes from self-discipline. You know, athletes are very self-discipline.

They have to be to compete according to the rules and not take shortcuts. But self-discipline is hard. It's a form of suffering. Or the suffering of a farmer because they have to work really hard.

And we heard from James about one such farmer last week. That hard work is so hard. It's like a form of suffering. But as James reminded us, God's grace gives us things to strengthen us to keep

going.

Like the reward of hearing Jesus say on that last day, well done, good and faithful servant. Like the reward of the victor's crown. Like the reward of sharing in the first share of the crops.

[ 4 : 56 ] Like the farmer. As well as just before our passage, if we endure verse 12 with Christ, we will reign with Christ. But we also heard that warning. If we disown him, he will disown us.

We're to remember these things. But Timothy is also to warn God's people about quarreling about words. That's the second thing he's to do in verse 14.

Because the false teachers loved doing this. Perhaps there were some words from the Old Testament or Greek philosophy, we don't know. But they love quarreling over these words.

My wife and I have quarreled over how to pronounce certain words in the past. Like is it contribute or is it contribute? What do you say? We've had some quarrels about this.

And when we moved to Melbourne, we had some quarrels about how to pronounce different words. Is it cicada or cicada? In Melbourne, is it potato cake or scallop or this went online.

[ 5 : 56 ] We can quarrel over words. Or like over the colour of this middle traffic light. Is it yellow like the picture? Or is it orange? Or is it amber? And again, who cares, right?

These things don't matter. What matters is the truth that they're communicating. That that middle light means speed up. I mean, I mean, it means slow down.

Well, these false teachers like to quarrel over words. In a meaningless way. When what mattered was the truth they were supposed to communicate. Which they didn't do either.

And so by their false teaching and by their word quarreling, they were simply ruining those who listened. And so we're not to get sucked into those sorts of quarrels.

Like over the word baptism. Some people argue, oh, it means to dunk. Or no, it means to dip. So, you know, do you get fully immersed or just splat? Well, it means both. And what really is important is the practice of it.

[ 6 : 58 ] And so Timothy is to teach the truth of God's word without quarreling over particular words. And he's to teach it clearly. Verse 15. Do you see the verse 15 again?

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, but who correctly handles the word of truth. He's to correctly handle the Bible. And that way he'll be a worker approved by God rather than being ashamed before God.

Because he didn't handle God's word correctly. And by correctly, poor means clearly here. The phrase correctly handles in its original language of the day means to cut a straight path.

And so it was used of cutting a straight path for travelers so they could get to their destination more easily. And so Timothy is to cut a straight path for the word to get to its destination, to our heads and our hearts more easily.

In other words, he's to teach God's word clearly so that we can understand it and be moved by it.

And yes, he's also to teach the Bible faithfully by avoiding the godless chatter of false teaching.

[ 8 : 15 ] Verse 16. Paul goes on to say, Avoid godless chatter because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus who have departed from the truth.

They say that the resurrection has already taken place and they destroy the faith of some. Here, Timothy is to avoid, verse 16, godless chatter, which is equated with their teaching in verse 17, of these guys who have, verse 18, departed from the truth.

In other words, godless chatter is more than quarreling. Godless chatter is the false teaching. And this false teaching, Paul says, is spreading like gangrene.

Gangrene, you know, is a disease that spreads across the body and eats away at the flesh. I was going to show you a photo, but it was a bit too gross, so I won't do that. But that's what false teaching does to the church.

It spreads through the church and eats away at people's faith. Even, the end of verse 18, destroying the faith of some. Of course, God will save those who are his, even if they fall for false teaching for a period of time.

[ 9 : 32 ] That's the reassurance Paul goes on to give in verse 19. Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription, the Lord knows those who are his.

And everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness. But that first inscription there gives great reassurance. God knows those who are his people.

And so even if they fall for false teaching for a period of time, God will keep them and bring them back to the truth. But the point here is, Timothy is to be an approved worker, rather than an ashamed worker before God.

By handling the word of truth correctly, which means teaching it clearly, and by avoiding the diseased lies, which means teaching it faithfully.

And so the first application is technically for those who teach the Bible, whether it's to our children at home, or those in kids' church, or the junior teens, or youth group, or Bible study, or from the front.

[10:37] We who teach need to teach it clearly and faithfully. We need to do it clearly, cut a straight path for it, and faithfully avoiding the diseased lies, that we might be fit for purpose as useful servants for God.

But the second application is for us all, to pray for those who teach God's word. I was really encouraged a couple of Sundays ago, one of our service leaders, as he was praying for us to hear God's word, he also prayed for those who were leading kids' church and the junior teens group, that they might teach the word clearly and faithfully to our kids and teenagers.

It's a great thing to pray, isn't it? And thirdly, the third application for us all is to grow in the truth, so that we can then spot and stop the spread of lies.

During COVID, we used to sanitize our hands almost every hour, didn't we? To stop the spread of the disease. Well, here we're to grow in the truth, so that we can spot and stop the spread of lies, which means reading God's word and studying it, and not just on Sundays, but during the week as well.

If you need help to do that, please come and talk to me or to Ricky James Fiona. We'd love to help. But it means reading God's word, studying it, asking questions about it, listening to the teaching from it, and then checking what you hear matches what you read, or so that we might grow in the truth of God's word.

[12:18] Because the better we know the word of truth, the easier it will be to spot the lie. It's kind of like what they did, remember, with the old banknotes? They'd study the true banknote, so that they would more easily spot the counterfeit banknote.

Or so too are we. Keep doing all you can to grow in the truth of God's word, so that you can spot and then stop the spread of lies. To be a useful servant for God, Timothy is firstly to be an approved worker, and secondly, a cleansed instrument.

So point to verse 20. In a large house, there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also wood and clay. Some are for special purposes and some for common use.

Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy and useful to the master, prepared or ready to do any good work.

In our house, we have a tablecloth on our table. You might do the same thing in your place. And one tablecloth kind of sits there the whole week.

[13:26] You can call it the common use tablecloth. And it gets very dirty very quickly, particularly where one family member sits. I won't say which one. And so our tablecloth is not very useful for the special purpose of guests.

I mean, it's not very welcoming to have a guest around to then sit down at a table with crumbs and food stains all over it. But if we wash it and iron it, in other words, if we cleanse it, then it will be fit for purpose, useful to us for the special purpose of having guests around.

And Paul's point is that if Timothy is to be useful to his master, fit for any good work, then he too needs to be cleansed, a cleansed instrument. Indeed, verse 21 says, he is to cleanse himself from the latter.

From the dirty common things in the house, which I take it in the context, are the sins of the false teachers who were still in God's house. Of course, it's really God who does the cleansing.

And so to cleanse himself really means to repent or turn away from sinful ways and ask God to forgive him. And then he'll be made holy, that is set apart, as ready, prepared for any good work that comes his way.

[14:51] Now, this is not just for Timothy, but for us all. Because you notice in verse 21, Paul says, those who cleanse themselves, plural. It's not just Timothy. In fact, just before in verse 19, he says, everyone who confesses the name of the Lord Jesus, that's every Christian, must turn away from wickedness.

And just after that house metaphor, he goes on in verse 22 to say, to Timothy, flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with us, those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus out of a pure heart.

You see, it's not just for Timothy, who's to cleanse himself from sin so that he can be useful for God. It's all of us. And just like Israel in our first reading, who were to follow God's commandments in order to be useful as a holy nation, a kingdom of priests.

So too, we are to flee evil desires and pursue purity, that we too might be useful for God. Which means, by the way, that we all can be useful to God.

If we're all to turn from sin, then we can all be useful to God. Even if we can no longer do the things we once did because of our stage of life, you know, whether kids are young and things are just too chaotic to do the things that we used to do before kids, or whether we have health issues which prevent us from doing the things we used to do at church.

[16:22] I know of one of our nine o'clock members who can't serve at church the way he once did because of his health. In fact, he struggles to even get to church and sometimes he has to use a wheelchair to come into the service.

And yet he's still very useful for God. For simply by making a huge effort to come and to smile at others and join in the hymns and so on, he's a great encouragement for others to keep going. For if he can persevere despite his suffering, then so too can they. In other words, he's a great example. You see, we can also be useful to God, but it starts with turning from sin and fleeing evil desires.

In other words, it starts with a godly character. Why? Well, first, because a godly character means we will want to do good works. You see, for the desires of our hearts, they shape the work of our hands, don't they?

And so if our hearts have evil or selfish desires, then our hands will do what? Evil or selfish works. That's just logic. That's the way it works. But if our hearts pursue righteousness, love and peace, then our hands will do works of righteousness, love and peace.

[17:43] In fact, if we have a godly character, then we'll not only want to do good works, then we'll just do them without realizing them, without even thinking.

That nine o'clock member doesn't come to church in thinking, oh, I'm going to try and encourage others. He just does it because he wants to worship God. He has a godly character. And so he's a great example without even realizing it.

And so the next application for us then is, when we sin, do we cleanse ourselves by repenting and seeking God's forgiveness?

And then pursuing that righteousness, faith, love and peace and so on, that we might be ready for any good work, that we might be like that cleansed tablecloth and ready for any guests who come over.

In a while, we'll have a chance to do that by saying a prayer of confession, which helps us to put that into practice. And the prayer of confession picks up some of these things from the verses.

[18:51] It says, we are sorry for our sins and turn away from them. That's verse 19. Turn away from wickedness. And then the prayer of confession goes on to say, cleanse us.

That's verse 21. You know, cleansing ourselves that we might be useful. The prayer also says, by your Holy Spirit, enable us to live for you. That's verse 22. To pursue righteousness, love, peace. We can do this any day. We don't have to just do it on this, wait for a Sunday. In fact, we got to keep doing it every day we sin, which means we may be doing it every single day.

So that we might be ready for any good work that comes our way. To be a useful servant for God, Timothy is firstly, to be an approved worker.

Secondly, a cleansed instrument, ready for any good work. And thirdly, and more briefly, a kind servant. So point three, verse 23.

[19:52] Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know, they produce quarrels. Quarrels are the opposite of peace that he's, he's to pursue in verse 22.

Remember the false teachers love quarreling over words. And back in verse 14, Timothy is to warn the people about getting sucked in as well. Because those who are servants of the Lord Jesus are not to be quarrelsome, but kind.

Verse 24. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them

repentance, leading them to a knowledge of the truth, that they will come to their senses, and escape from the trap of the devil, who is taking them captive to do his will. Now here, the focus is on those like Timothy, whose particular role is to teach the Bible. That's why in verse 24, it adds, able to teach.

And so here, the primary application again, is for those who teach, we are to teach it gently. So in other words, we're to be, verse 24, kind to everyone.

[ 21 : 13 ] Verse 25, we are to gently instruct others, hoping that they might come to repentance. You see, the goal is not to win the argument.

The goal is to win the person for Jesus. And while the focus here is on those who teach, this is actually true for all of us, as we speak to others about Jesus.

You know, do we all speak to others gently? Especially those who might oppose us or ridicule us. You go to church? What? You believe in that guy, Jesus?

Really? But we're to talk to them gently. Again, not to, because we're not trying to win an argument. We're trying to win their soul. Help them to have the same hope we have.

Win them for Jesus. I mean, if you're quarrelsome and harsh with people, then are they likely to listen to you? Of course not. Their backs go up and their ears close.

[ 22 : 14 ] And so we're to speak to others gently, patiently, not resentfully. Because again, it's not about winning an argument. It's about winning the person for Jesus. So the Lord's servant must be kind and speak gently.

Well, there are lots of things in life that are not fit for purpose. I like this doggy door I saw. It's obviously way too small.

But to be a useful servant for God who guards the gospel, Timothy is to be fit for purpose, which means being an approved worker who teaches clearly and faithfully, a cleansed instrument ready for any good work, and a kind servant who speaks gently.

Indeed, these are the type of people Timothy is to entrust the gospel to back in verse 2. These are the type of people that we look out for who might become the next generation of gospel workers. But we're all to be useful servants for God as well. Whether it's by praying for those who teach or growing in the truth ourselves so we can spot and stop the spread of diseased lies.

[ 23 : 22 ] Or whether it's by being kind servants who speak to others gently, that we might not win the argument but win them for Jesus. Or whether it's by being cleansed instruments, that we too might be ready for any good work that comes our way.

In fact, why don't we begin now by cleansing ourselves, saying that prayer of confession. So why don't we join in on the screen, saying, Together, Heavenly Father, you have loved us with an everlasting love, but we have often gone our own way and rejected your will for our lives.

We are sorry for our sins and turn away from them. For the sake of your Son who died for us, forgive us, cleanse us, and change us.

By your Holy Spirit, enable us to live for you and to please you in every way. For the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.