



2 TIMOTHY 4:11

## To Be of Use

5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY DURING LENT – APRIL 02, 2017 (PM)

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### INTRODUCTION:

Paul's final instructions to Timothy, and among the last words of scripture that he wrote: "Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry."

Let me begin this evening with a few questions. First, do you think Timothy was successful in bringing Mark? Scripture actually gives us the answer to this one (Col. 4:10). In Colossians, one of the four epistles written from a Roman jail, Paul brings greetings from Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (By the way, MLK did not invent the genre with his letter from a Birmingham jail!)

Okay, here's another question. Is there any significance to Paul's desire for Mark to come, and quickly, because he was 'useful in ministry' to Paul? Yes of course, in light of what we know about Mark from Acts 12-15. Here is the short hand summary.

- Paul and Barnabas bring a gift from Antioch to Jerusalem, and return bringing with them, Barnabas' cousin, John Mark.
- Mark accompanies them on their first missionary journey.
- He accompanies them to Cypress, he is with them when the first truly gentile convert is converted (Sergius Paulus), he sees Paul's confrontation with the magician Elymas (Bar-Jesus). He travels with them across the island of Crete. He accompanies them by ship from Paphos to Perga, then he disappears from the story.
- His fading footsteps reappear in Ch. 15
- Paul and Barnabas have a falling out as they are ready to launch the 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey.

- Barnabas wants to take Mark with them once again, but Paul clearly considers Mark a deserter. So, they part ways and Barnabas and Mark head to Cyprus, while Paul chooses Silas to accompany him on the 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey.

So, a lot of water has passed under the bridge and can you think of any better commendation from the pen or tongue of the apostle Paul than this simple one, that the deserter has become 'useful in ministry.' It is a testimony of a restoration that is full, and filled with grace, and tonight I want to take a few minutes and consider the highly improbable truth that people like you and me can become useful in ministry!

## WHAT DOES USEFULNESS LOOK LIKE?

Does the name Uri Geller mean anything to any of you? Good. I asked that question of our ABF class some time ago and it rang a bell for a few. He was a self-proclaimed psychic who garnered a measure of celebrity in the 1970's. One time he came on the 'Milt Rosenberg' radio show and demonstrated that he had the power to "bend spoons" by the sheer power of his concentration...and could do so over the air waves. He proceeded to demonstrate (on air), and sure enough a few people called in to testify to the veracity of his claims! Of course, the radio host was as reticent as Ulalee McChechney Shinn! I heard the show and I was not persuaded either. Sometime later I mentioned the scene to my Dad, who replied characteristically, "well, if he could have done something useful, like butter my toast, that would really be something!"

Wise words from a pretty wise man, but the point is that sometimes actual competence really matters. I don't need someone who can bend spoons when I need my driver's side front tire changed at 5:25 pm on a Thursday night on the side of the Eisenhower expressway!

## COMPETENCE & USEFULNESS

Over the past couple of months, we have taken a tour of these two letters from Paul to Timothy, and this theme of competence, of usefulness if you will, runs boldly through both.

### 1 Timothy 1:18-19a

*This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience.*

## 1 Timothy 3

*If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.... therefore, an overseer must be .....*

### 1 Timothy 3:14

*I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God...*

### 1 Timothy 4:6

*...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. . . rather train yourself for godliness.*

### 1 Tim 4:12

*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. . . Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.*

### 1 Timothy 6:12

*... but as for you man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, righteousness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold (Harry S. Truman evaluated his appointees to various very important offices by determining whether they have 'taken-hold.' We all understand I think what it means to take hold in this sense. It means to roll up your sleeves in the pursuit of a task, it infers a determination and a resolve to see a task through.... or die trying.) ...of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession before many witnesses.*

## 2 Timothy 1

*Fan into flame the gift of God which is in you. . . Do not be ashamed. . . share in the suffering. . . For I know whom I have believed. . . follow the pattern of sound words...*

## 2 Timothy

References to soldiers, athletes, hard working farmers, all of which have highly specific required competencies.

## 2 Timothy 2:15

*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has not need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth...*

## 2 Timothy 2: 20

This passage talks about vessels of wood and clay and silver and gold, and all have uses in the great house. Timothy is urged to cleanse himself *from all that is dishonorable*. . . . In order to be a vessel, *set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work*.

## 2 Timothy 3:10

*You however have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, my sufferings...*

## 2 Timothy 3:14

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus . . . that the man of God may be **competent**, equipped for every good work.*

## 2 Timothy 4:2

*Preach the word, be ready in season and out of season.; reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching.*

## 2 Timothy 4:5

*As for you, always be sober minded, endure suffering do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

## USEFULNESS VS COMPETENCE

His name was Sung-Gu, and the year was about 1985 and the place was Park Ridge Illinois. We had just begun an enormous roof tear off getting ready to build a 2<sup>nd</sup> story on a ranch house. It was hot, hard, dangerous work, and it was Sun-gu's first day. He was probably 18 years old and this may well have been his first actual job..... and he was utterly overwhelmed. He was terrified to climb the ladder. He did not know the names of any tools. He was not strong enough lift and throw and drag lumber. He was distinctly

'not useful' to me! And around 10:30 he was also missing! After making sure that we had not inadvertently buried him in a pile of roofing, I went in the house (the owners were not home), and there he was, in the kitchen, making himself a peanut butter sandwich. He had found the peanut butter and the bread and the jelly, a knife, a glass, and a gallon of milk! ...I said in utter dismay, "Sun-Gu...what are you doing?" He replied with these simple words..... "I was just...so hungry!"

I think what he was really saying was something like this: "I am completely over my head here, I am terrified, I know nothing, I don't even know where I am (park ridge) But... I do know one thing... and that is, how to make a peanut butter sandwich. So here I am in a stranger's kitchen doing the only thing I am good at."

One day, I hope to run into Sung-Gu and I will tell him that I understand! We all want to be useful. For our friends at Meadowbrook Manor nursing home in Naperville, that is what they long for, to be of use. I love the poem by Marge Piercy titled, [To Be of Use](#). I will not burden you with a recitation for you this evening, but you can find it easily.

## WHAT ABOUT US?

What about us? You and me? Do we ache to be useful to the master of the house? I want us to leave here tonight encouraged that our Savior has thought of everything! We are not merely saved, we are redeemed to a called and useful purpose. Created in the image of God, commissioned to fill this earth and to have dominion over it, called and equipped to obey the commandments of our God, to proclaim this God to a world without any sense of real usefulness, to proclaim this God and his word to our children, to write his commandments on our doorposts, on our gates, to talk of them when we lie down, and when we walk along the way..... We are creatures who long to be, and are supernaturally enabled to "be of use" ... praise the Lord anybody?

When I first started to think about this theme that runs through these letters, I pretty much thought of usefulness and competence as the same thing. I do not think that is accurate and the distinction may shed a little bit of light on each. It is possible to be competent at a task and not particularly useful. It is also possible to be useful without possessing, as Napoleon Dynamite might phrase it, "any sweet nunchuk skills." ...But is also true that as competence grows, usefulness exponentially increases!

I had the privilege of watching a bone marrow transplant up at the Mayo Clinic. In observing the procedure, (which to me, seemed like the procedure used in patching the hole in a tire...) I noticed the skill and the way in which the team worked together. Afterwards, I had the chance to speak with them. They told me they complete over 4,000 biopsies per year. It was like watching a ballet or a double play combo from deep in the hole!

## **WHAT DOES A REFLECTION ON USEFULNESS TELL US ABOUT OUR SAVIOR?**

### **1 Corinthians 1-2**

Those people whom God finds useful are not the ones we are likely to point out! It is the weak but yielded, the bewildered but obedient, the humble but eager to serve. Studying what God finds useful will drive us to tears.

### **Ephesians 2:10**

I am going to call this the 'ownership' of God. We are his good works. His signature is on the bottom corner of each of us. [check in the mirror when you get home]

### **Matthew 25:21**

The kindness of God is on display as he considers our usefulness. It is God himself who will lift-up our chin, raise us up, to be more and more conformed to the image of his Son.

### **Psalm 1**

The Lord God has promised to make us useful, and will see that it is done! He will produce the fruit in its season.

Dottie Powell, a missionary in Ivory Coast, fell ill. Lying in a gurney, feeling life slip away, she was informed that she needed to be air lifted from the primitive hospital in Ivory Coast, west Africa, to New York. She lay there horrified at the astronomical expense that this flight with an attending physician might require. In her head, she was comparing the expenses of this trip that could have gone somewhere else, to pay for more bibles to be published or to send more missionaries. She longed to be of some earthly use, but found that she could do nothing. In desperation over her utter uselessness, cried out to the Lord with a prayer that was Spirit enabled. "Okay Lord, I can only do one thing, I can be sick for you. Help me to do that task well!"

## CONCLUSION: SOME TAKEAWAYS AND SOME CAUTIONS

I want to leave you with some paths to follow in our pursuit of usefulness.

Encourage others in their usefulness.

- When you become of use, you become dear to those you love and to those who love you. See Philemon verse 12!
- When you are useful, you are no longer a slave but a brother (Philemon 16)!

Evaluate your usefulness not by the nature of the skill or the gifting, but by the encouragement it brings to others.

Salt your competence with faithfulness. The result will be usefulness. It is almost mathematical in its certainty. It is the coming back, the taking hold, that encourages the heart.

Allow the weak and the poor and the foolish and the unskilled to become useful..... Modify the task if necessary, and yes accept the near certainty that you could have done it better! Does the driveway need to be scooped to perfection at the expense of an 8-year old boy's sense of uselessness and incompetence?

Pray for each other (Philemon 22). Buddy Williams, a coach I had in high school, who in the 90's contracted some version of Parkinson's, he committed to pray for me and my wife and family daily! ...Useful?

Finally, and I will close with this, trust God's word to make us useful. Read it. Memorize it in small or large portions. Let it percolate in your soul. 2 Timothy 3:16 "all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."

As my Dad might have said, 'Now go out and be useful to someone!'

Amen.