

2 Timothy 2:20-26 | “Fit for the Master’s Use”  
*Preached on February 26, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown*

You can turn in your Bibles to 2 Timothy 2, verses 20-26, as we finish out chapter 2 this morning. *[pause]*

There’s a story of “Henry Martyn, a Cambridge University student, [who] was honored at only 20 years of age for his achievements in mathematics.

In fact, he was given the highest recognition possible in that field. And yet he felt an emptiness inside.

He said that instead of finding fulfillment in his achievements, he had, ‘Only grasped a shadow.’ *[pause]*

After evaluating his life’s goals, Martyn sailed to India as a missionary at the age of 24. When he arrived, he prayed, ‘Lord, let me burn out for You.’

In the next 7 years that preceded his death, he translated the New Testament into three difficult Eastern languages.”<sup>1</sup> *[pause]*

Do you want to be used by God?

Do you want to make an impact on the world for Christ?

Do you want God to use you in beautiful, wonderful ways? *[pause]*

I sure hope so, because there is nothing like being an instrument in the hands of God. *[pause]*

But the question is: *who* does God use?

I find that we go to one of two extremes in thinking about who God can use...

The one extreme is that we think that the people God uses are some elite group that we could never be included in. *[pause]*

But does God only use the people who are outgoing and naturally gifted?

Does He solely use Bible college or seminary trained people?

Does He use only the perfect person?

Does He use the self-sufficient go-getters?

No, for what we will find this morning is that all Christians are able to be used to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Original Source: *Facing Loneliness*, J. Oswald Sanders. Found at: <https://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/grasping-a-shadow>.

It's not some secret society, where only those with an invitation and a password are allowed to enter. *[pauseeee]*

So the one extreme is thinking that God only uses a certain elite group, and He bars off others from ever entering it.

But the other extreme is to think that God will use you no matter what, and so it doesn't matter how you live.

*That likewise is an incorrect way to think, for what we find this morning is that...*

### **I. The Lord uses those who are cleansed vessels. (20-21)**

Paul has been encouraging Timothy to faithful service and he has used different images to get his point across. *[pause]*

Timothy is to be like a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer: focused, disciplined, and hard-working.

He is to be a good worker, who is unashamed of his work.

And now Paul gives another image of what Timothy should strive to be: a vessel for honorable use. *[pauseeee]*

In verse 19, Paul described the church as God's house, which has a firm foundation.

Now in our passage, he continues that house imagery, for just listen as I read verses 20-26. *[READ VERSES 20-26]*

Paul uses the illustration of a great house, a master of the house, and his vessels.

The great house is referring to the church, the master is of course Christ, and the vessels are those within the church.

Let's take them one-by-one. *[pause]*

A great house is talking about a wealthy person's home, and isn't a great house such a good description of the church? *[pause]*

It's great because of who has built it and who owns it.

It is God's house, and He has built it at great cost because Jesus Christ shed His blood for it. *[pause]*

It's great also because believers from all across the world are included in it. *[pauseeee]*

Christ is the Master of the house, and so He has the rights over and control over all that's in the house.

We are merely His vessels in His house.

So we don't call the shots, but He uses us as He deems best. *[pauseeee]*

So much of our problem is that we don't see Christ as the Master of the house, and we, His vessels.

We sometimes try to switch the roles, don't we?

But we must remember that we are a part of something big and important.

We are a part of God's great house, and He is the Master.

We get to play a part in His grand work in the world - what a privilege and honor! *[pauseeee]*

It is a great joy to be used by the Master.

But do you even *want* to be used by the Master? *[pauseee]*

He is your Lord, who died for you, and has called you to live for Him.

So let's all say in our hearts, "I want to be used by God!"

As John Stott says, "No higher honour could be imagined than to be an instrument in the hand of Jesus Christ, to be at his disposal for the furtherance of his purposes, to be available whenever wanted for his service."<sup>2</sup> *[pauseeee]*

But who are the ones that God uses?

That's where the illustration of the house and vessels comes in.

Paul talks about how there are vessels for honorable use and others for dishonorable use. *[pause]*

In a wealthy home, there were more expensive vessels that were used in public, and they were beautiful and clean like a decoration pot or a plate.

But there were also unclean, inexpensive vessels that were used for trash or waste. *[pause]*

So the vessels for honorable use were useful for good purposes, but the vessels for dishonorable use were kind of disregarded vessels.

They weren't as useful, and sometimes even discarded, for they broke easier. *[pause]*

So Paul is making a contrast here.

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<sup>2</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel the Message of 2 Timothy, The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 72.

In God's house, there are vessels that are useful to Him, for they are clean, while there are other vessels that are not useful or set apart for good purposes. *[pauseee]*

So there are people in the church that are like vessels for honorable use and others, who are vessels for dishonorable use.

The ones for honorable use are fit for the Master's use, but the dishonorable are not. *[pause]*

Think about a dirty bowl.

It's not really useful for much is it?

But a clean bowl is ready to be used for serving or for eating or for decoration - it's useful to the owner.

That's what Paul is talking about. *[pauseee]*

I think back to my own life in my teenage years.

In my teens, I wasn't really living for the Lord, but focused on myself.

I was concerned with the things of this world, rather than the things of the Lord. *[pause]*

At that time, I wasn't fit to be used by the Master, ready for every good work.

I was definitely not as useful as I could have been, for I wasn't ready to encourage someone with the truth.

How could I when I wasn't dwelling on the truth myself?

How could I serve others more when I was only seeking to serve myself?

How could I impact others when I was caught in sin and distracted with the things of this world?  
*[pause]*

You see, sin hinders our ability to be used by God, and hinders our ability to be prepared for service.

We aren't as useful as we could be.

That's why Paul says, "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." *[pauseee]*

So in order to be fit for the Master's use, we must cleanse ourselves from false teaching and sin.  
*[pauseeee]*

Timothy couldn't be acting like the false teachers and expect to be used mightily by God.

He couldn't be quarreling and pursuing sinful things, and expect to be used more. *[pauseeee]*

Some of you may wonder, "Why doesn't God use *me* more?"

And the answer may be, "Well, are you seeking to put away sin and pursue righteousness?"  
*[pauseeeee]*

It is the one who is cleansed who is set apart by the Lord.

He sets you apart for His good, beautiful purposes, and you are useful to Him.

He thinks, "Yes, this is one that I can use for this task or for that task," for you will be ready for every good work. *[pause]*

What happens is that you become available for His use, effective, and prepared to do anything He calls you to do. *[pauseeee]*

In my teenage years, I couldn't say that I was available and prepared to do anything He called me to do.

I was too focused on myself and not pursuing the best things. *[pauseeee]*

You can't just think, "Oh, I'll be ready when the time comes."

No, you must be putting sin to death and pursuing righteousness now.

It's when we are pursuing godliness that we become more ready and prepared for any and every good work that the Lord has for us. *[pauseeee]*

Pastor Steven Cole gives some good examples when he says this...

"Have you ever been angry when suddenly you have an opportunity to bear witness for Christ? You weren't prepared, were you?"

Or have you ever been grumbling about something when you encountered a brother or sister who needed a word of encouragement?

You probably didn't even notice the need, let alone respond appropriately.

But if you are cleansed, you're ready to serve the Lord in any good work that He sets before you."<sup>3</sup> *[pauseeee]*

This reality is not closed off to anyone, but if you would simply cleanse yourself of what is dishonorable, you are able to be used more by God. *[pause]*

This cleansing is not works-salvation.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-13-person-god-uses-2-timothy-220-22>.

We aren't forgiving our own sin, for only Christ forgives us by His blood.

But rather, it's the cleansing that happens when we move away from sin and pursue holiness.  
[pause]

This is not legalism, where we are trying to gain God's favor, for we have it in Christ.

Rather, it's a response of obedience and love because of God's marvelous grace to us. [pause]

Those who have experienced the grace of Christ desire to pursue holiness, and *want* to be used by Him.

They depend on His strength to do this, for Paul started out this chapter by saying, "be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus."<sup>4</sup> [pauseeee]

Now some of you may think, "I've failed, so God can't use me."

But think about this: David failed greatly, but he was also used greatly by God. [pause]

He could have thought, "Well, I'm useless. I just committed adultery and murdered someone."

Yet, he repents of his sin, and pursues the heart of God, and is used greatly by the Lord. [pause]

John Mark was deemed useless by Paul in Acts, but later on, Paul tells Timothy to bring Mark, "for he is very *useful* to me for ministry."<sup>5</sup> [pause]

Your shameful past doesn't disqualify you.

What matters is what you are going to do now.

Are you going to be sloshing around in sin, or are you going to flee it, and pursue righteousness?  
[pauseeee]

I pray that each of us would want to be used by God for great, good, beautiful purposes.

We should want to be someone that the Lord can say, "I can use him right now, for he is ready for every good work."

Or, "She is useful to me right now, for she is available and ready to minister and serve." [pause]

If we are addicted to pornography, how can we be prepared to help that person who is struggling with their own addictions?

If we are constantly quarreling with people, how can we be ready to help people to have peaceful relationships with others? [pause]

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<sup>4</sup> 2 Timothy 2:1.

<sup>5</sup> See Acts 15:36-41. The verse quoted is 2 Timothy 4:11 (italics is mine; 'useful' here is the same word for useful used in verse 21).

So let's put sin to death, and pursue holiness, knowing that the Lord Jesus Christ *wants* to use us, and that's both astonishing and humbling. *[pauseeee]*

We won't be perfect, so please don't think this is about sinless perfection, for none of us can get there.

But this is simply someone who is pursuing godliness in the strength of the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

**Some of you could be used so much more for the Lord, and I want that for you.**

I want that for myself, too, for I could be used more, and there's a joy that comes from that, and a fulfillment, too. *[pauseeee]*

*So Paul has given Timothy the call to be a cleansed vessel for the Lord, but as he continues into verses 22-26, he shows us...*

## **II. What this cleansing looks like (22-26)**

Imagine that you wanted to make a meal that you never made before.

You look at the recipe, and the recipe gives you all of the ingredients that you will need, but when you look at the instructions on how to make it, all it says is, "Make the meal."

If that happened to you, it would be hard, right?

You wouldn't know where to start and what to do. *[pause]*

Well thankfully, Paul doesn't do that to Timothy (or us) here.

**He gives us the list of items for the meal *and* the instructions on how to make it, so to say.**  
*[pause]*

He shows us what it looks like to cleanse ourselves from what is dishonorable, for he says in verse 22, "So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace." *[pause]*

We see that Timothy must "flee" something and "pursue" something else, instead. *[pause]*

He is to flee "youthful passions".

'Passions' are the sinful desires, longings, and cravings that we often have.

And Timothy was a younger man, and so Paul knew that Timothy had a temptation to give into youthful passions. *[pause]*

**The truth is, we each face various passions within us.**

For some, we have youthful passions, but for others it might be other passions, but they are all to be avoided. *[pauseeee]*

These youthful passions could involve many different things, but primarily here, they may be the tendency for younger people to love to argue.

They often rush into heated debates with overconfidence and a lack of wisdom.

They regularly love novelty and can be tempted to be unkind, arrogant, and reckless with a desire for renown. *[pause]*

Other youthful passions could be mentioned, but the point is the same: flee from them. *[pauseeee]*

Maybe you are younger like Timothy or me, or maybe you are older.

Either way, we must flee these sinful passions that we have. *[pause]*

These passions will rise up in you and you will start to feel a longing to give into them.

But will you give in or will you flee? *[pause]*

Don't toy around with these passions.

Don't think, "The desire isn't super strong in me right now, I can let it go."

No, when you feel these sinful passions, RUN, relying on the Spirit to help you, for they are dangerous and can overtake you. *[pauseeee]*

But we see here that we don't just run away *from* sin, but we run *to* righteousness. *[pause]*

So many times growing up I would hear about sins to avoid, but they wouldn't tell me what to pursue instead.

But the Bible is a "both-and" not an "either-or" when it comes to sin and righteousness. *[pause]*

Don't just flee sin, but run to righteousness.

"Pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace," Paul says. *[pause]*

Aim at and strive for godliness.

Seek to do what's right, to trust God more, to love others deeper, and to be at peace with everyone. *[pauseeee]*

Evaluate your own life.

How are you doing with fleeing sin and pursuing godliness?

Which do you tend to neglect more? *[pause]*

Do you tend to toy around with your sinful desires too much, instead of making a run for it?



Or maybe for you, it's that you don't necessarily pursue godliness, but just think that it will come by itself. *[pauseeee]*

The key is that once you feel that sinful desire rise up, quickly say, "No," and turn away from it, relying upon God to help you.

The longer you let it linger, the stronger it becomes.

So RUN! *[pause]*

Some of you may not be able to run physically, but I sure hope you run away from sin. *[pause]*

And as you think through your day, think, "I want to pursue love and peace. I want to strive to be more loving to my spouse today, or to be more at peace with my co-worker." *[pauseeee]*

In his endeavor to flee and to pursue, thankfully Timothy isn't alone in this, for all believers are called to do this.

Paul says to do this, "along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart." *[pauseeee]*

So generally, Timothy can be a cleansed vessel, fit for the Master's use, by fleeing sin and pursuing righteousness.

But now Paul moves into specifically how Timothy can do this in his pastoral role.

Notice in verse 23, Paul says, "Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels." *[pauseeee]*

Timothy must refuse to get involved in the disputes, arguments, and debates going on.

They are foolish debates, and uneducated, uninstructed debates. *[pauseeee]*

These kinds of debates breed quarrels. *[pause]*

To see examples of foolish, ignorant arguments that breed quarrels, just go on social media.

And Paul is saying that Timothy ought to avoid these! *[pauseeee]*

A Christian has no place jumping into these foolish debates because all they do is cause conflict.

Is that really what a Christian should be interested in? *[pause]*

Christians are supposed to be peacemakers.<sup>6</sup>

Christians are supposed to be concerned with truth and wisdom, not folly and ignorance. *[pauseeee]*

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<sup>6</sup> See Matthew 5:9.

I see Christians jump into these kinds of foolish, ignorant controversies all the time, and you can predict the outcome with almost perfect precision: a quarrel breaks out.

So let's all avoid these disputes, knowing what they breed. *[pauseeee]*

So Timothy is to avoid these controversies, and pursue what a pastor ought to be, for Paul reminds him of what a pastor "must be" in verse 24...

"And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness." *[pause]*

Looking at these qualities, we see that a pastor is to be self-controlled, truth-speaking, and kind. *[pause]*

He is self-controlled, for he doesn't jump into quarrels, and he's able to endure evil patiently, instead of losing his temper.

He is truth-speaking, for he's both able to teach and active in correcting his opponents.

And he's kind, for he's not a fighter or arguer, but treats people with gentleness. *[pauseeee]*

What's interesting is that our world doesn't view a strong man as a gentle man.

Instead, what's lifted up is that man who is winning arguments in a quarrelsome way and "destroying" his opponents. *[pause]*

Our culture often sees gentleness and kindness as weakness in a man, but not according to the Lord.

According to God, a strong, godly man is a gentle, kind, and tender man.

He's not weak, but his strength is under control, so that he uses his strength in loving ways. *[pauseeee]*

There are going to be those who are false teachers and people who try to say wrong things, but the pastor is someone who should be able to correct them in a gentle manner.

He isn't to be harsh, mean, or quarrelsome with them. *[pause]*

You see, it matters WHAT we say, but it also matters HOW we say it. *[pause]*

If someone is merely trying to win arguments by putting others down, then they are not handling people Biblically.

Gentleness in speech matters. *[pause]*

You can stand boldly for the truth in a gentle manner: it's possible, you know. *[pauseeee]*

Although this is speaking of what a pastor must do and be, it can also apply generally to all believers, for he is to be an example to the flock.<sup>7</sup> *[pauseeee]*

So do you speak to people gently or are you harsh with them?

This is really counter-cultural, for the people opposing the truth are so rough and harsh, so we think that we need to act like them in order to be successful.

We think that kindness and gentleness are too soft and weak and won't win arguments.

But that's the thing, we aren't to set out to win arguments, we are to "win" people to the truth. *[pause]*

To do this, we must have utmost confidence in the truth and in our God.

For look at the potential outcome of correcting people with gentleness in verse 25: "God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth." *[pause]*

Gentle, yet bold correction can play a part in leading people to repentance!

Get this: when we seek to do what's right, people can be saved, and so what are we seeing?

We get to be an instrument in the Redeemer's hands! *[pause]*

Do you see the connection now with what Paul said about being a cleansed vessel?

If Timothy strives to pursue godliness in his role as pastor, God will use him to impact the lives of others. *[pause]*

God has to work in their hearts, and grant them repentance, but God can use our gentle correction as a part of that work.

It's not the loudness of our speech, the harshness of our speech, or the meanness of our speech that leads people to repent and change their view of the truth.

Rather, it's gentle correction that God uses and works in their heart to draw them to Himself. *[pauseeee]*

This flips the world's values on its head!

It's not roughness, but gentleness that God desires and what God uses. *[pauseeee]*

And what happens when God grants these people repentance?

They recognize the truth, come to their senses, and escape the snare of the Devil. *[pauseeee]*

What helps us to gently correct those who oppose the truth is remembering that very reality...

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<sup>7</sup> See 1 Peter 5:3.

The Devil is the real enemy, for those who oppose the truth are captured by him. *[pause]*

Other people are not actually the true enemy, for they are captives of Satan.

They need to come to their senses and escape his snare.

And God uses truth spoken in gentleness as a means of breaking them loose out of their entrapment. *[pause]*

*Understanding this then...*

**Seek to be a cleansed vessel that the Lord can use!**

Flee from sin and pursue righteousness.

Seek to do what God has called you to do, relying upon His strength. *[pause]*

When you do this, you become a vessel that is fit for the Master's use, ready to be used for every good work.

And there's nothing like being an instrument in the hands of God. *[pause]*

Imagine the deep sense of joy and fulfillment to play a part in helping to change the direction of someone's life for the better.

Or to uplift someone who was so downcast that it seemed like nothing would help. *[pause]*

Imagine being used by God to bring restoration in a marriage, or to resolve a bitter conflict, which results in wonderful reconciliation and peace.

Or imagine the blessing of seeing someone so against God's Word repent and break free from Satan's hold because you simply spoke the truth with gentleness. *[pause]*

There's nothing like serving the King of kings in His great work in the world.

So seek to be a cleansed vessel that the Lord can use! *[pauseeee]*

When you look to Christ, you see that He was actually the perfect, clean vessel for honorable use.

He was set apart, and perfectly did the work of God, saving us through His death and resurrection. *[pause]*

He was THE Servant of the Lord, patiently enduring evil on the Cross, and instructing us with gentleness, so that we were led to repentance.

He broke us free from Satan's hold, so that we could come to the knowledge of the truth. *[pause]*

What a Savior we have, and what an honor it is to serve Him as His vessels.