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SAVED TO SERVE

2 Timothy 1:6-7

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2 Timothy Lesson 2

Saved to Serve
2 Timothy 1:6-7

A farmer had a team of horses in which one horse consistently worked harder than any of the others. The farmer said, "They're all willin' horses. The one's willin' to pull and the rest are willin' to let him."

Sadly, that is often an accurate description of the local church. In fact, pastors often refer to what they call the 80-20 rule, which states that 20 percent of the church members do 80 percent of the work. But God never intended it to be that way. He intended that all whom He saved should serve His cause in some capacity.

There are many reasons that Christians do not serve the Lord. Some don't serve because their commitment to Christ and His church is half-hearted. They attend church occasionally, but their real interests are in the world. Serving in the church would be an inconvenience for them. Others have tried serving, but they lacked training and grew frustrated and quit. Some quit because other church members criticized them. Others burned out trying to do too much. Some quit serving because they were serving out of the wrong motivation. They were looking for commendation from people, not from God. But for whatever reason, many Christians grow weary of the hassle of serving the Lord and retreat to a more comfortable seat on the sidelines.

It seems that Timothy had a tendency to retreat from the front lines of serving Christ. He was rather shy and timid, and not in the best of health (1 Tim. 5:23). His relative youthfulness caused him to be a bit unsure of himself when difficult issues required confident leadership (1 Tim. 4:12). Once Paul had to write to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 16:10), "Now if Timothy comes to you, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid." Paul knew that the rowdy Corinthians might run roughshod over this insecure man.

As Paul sat chained in a Roman dungeon, awaiting execution, he knew that he had to hand off the torch to Timothy. So he wrote this final letter to encourage Timothy to keep running the race in

spite of difficulties and opposition. His words should encourage any of us who may be tempted to draw back from actively serving the Lord to persevere. And this book exhorts all who know Christ, but are not serving, to get into the race.

In 2 Timothy 1:6-11, Paul is encouraging Timothy to continue serving the Lord with all of his strength, in spite of opposition. His flow of thought goes like this: "Because you are saved, you must serve (1:6-7); but when you serve, be prepared to suffer (1:8); when you suffer, remember your salvation and God's call to preach the gospel (1:9-11)." Then Paul points to his own example of serving in spite of suffering (1:12) and to the example of Onesiphorus (1:16-18). The theme here is, even if you suffer for serving Christ, do not be ashamed of the gospel or of those who preach the gospel (1:8, 12, 16). Today we can only look at the first section (1:6-7):

Because you are saved you must serve Christ.

"For this reason" (1:6) points back to 1:5, to Timothy's salvation. Paul is saying, "Because I know that you have a sincere faith in Jesus Christ, you must kindle afresh (or, keep in full flame) your spiritual gift by actively using it in serving the Lord."

1. Make sure that you are saved before you try to serve.

Salvation is the foundation for any genuine service that we can offer to the Lord. It is a huge mistake to think that you can offer God anything before you first receive His gift of salvation. For example, people fall into this error by thinking that if they give financially to a church or a Christian organization, they are doing something that will commend them to God on judgment day.

But God will not be indebted to anyone. He will not let you into heaven as a payment for anything that you do for Him. Salvation is a free gift. If you can do anything to earn it or deserve it, then it is no longer a gift of God's grace, but a wage or a reward that is due (Rom. 4:4-5). Good works follow salvation, but they cannot in any way earn it (Eph. 2:8-10). So, before you get involved in any way to serve the Lord, make sure that you're saved.

2. God gifts every saved person for service.

Maybe you're thinking, "I already know this." Timothy knew it, too, but Paul reminded him of it again (1:6): "For this reason

[because you are saved], I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you....” There are two ways in which God gifts every saved person:

A. God’s main gift is the Holy Spirit Himself.

Every Christian receives the Holy Spirit to indwell him or her at the moment of salvation. In Romans 8:9, Paul asserts, “But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him” (see also, Gal. 3:2, 5). In the context of spiritual gifts, Paul writes (1 Cor. 12:13), “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

Some scholars argue that when Paul says (1:7), “God has not given us a spirit of timidity,” “Spirit” refers to the Holy Spirit and should be capitalized (Gordon Fee, *New International Biblical Commentary, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* [Hendrickson Publishers], pp. 226-227). Others understand it to refer to the inner spirit or demeanor that should characterize every believer. Whichever view is correct, it is clear that power, love, and discipline are qualities that come from the Holy Spirit. But God’s main gift to every believer is the indwelling Holy Spirit, who empowers us to serve Him. We need to walk daily in dependence on the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16).

B. The Holy Spirit imparts spiritual gifts to every believer.

It is significant that in each of the four main biblical references to spiritual gifts, it specifies that *every* Christian has a gift:

Romans 12:3: “For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted *to each* a measure of faith.” Paul goes on to discuss spiritual gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:7: “But to *each one* is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” Again, Paul goes on to discuss spiritual gifts.

Ephesians 4:7: “But to *each one* of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” In verse 16, he mentions “the whole body, being fitted and held together by what *every* joint supplies, according to the proper working of *each* individual part....”

1 Peter 4:10: "As *each one* has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

God doesn't want us to miss the point! If you are a Christian, you have been given a spiritual gift that you are to use in service (or, ministry) for the Lord. The term, "inactive church member" is a contradiction in terms. If you're a believer, you're in the ministry and you will someday give an account to the Lord of how you fulfilled the ministry that He entrusted to you.

If you're thinking, "But I lack the gifts to serve the Lord," remember, God never calls you to a ministry where He doesn't also give you the gifts to fulfill. This is not to say that it will be effortless or easy. Even Paul, when considering the responsibility of preaching the gospel, exclaimed (2 Cor. 2:16), "And who is adequate for these things?" He answered that question (2 Cor. 3:5), "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God."

So if you're saved, God has graciously imparted at least one spiritual gift to you to use in serving Him.

3. God sovereignly gifts us, but we are responsible to discover, develop, kindle, and exercise our gifts.

In 1 Corinthians 12:11, Paul says, "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills." God is sovereign in how He bestows spiritual gifts. We need to remember that whether it is a natural ability or a spiritual gift, everything that we have is a gift of God's grace (Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 4:7; Eph. 4:7). Thus none of us can boast in our gifts. All we can do is use them to glorify God. We would be nothing without Him!

A common question is, how can I discover my spiritual gift?

A. We discover our gifts by our desires and abilities, by serving, by recognition from others, and by effectiveness.

There is debate as to whether each person has only one gift or several. It seems to me that the apostle Paul had many spiritual gifts. So I don't find any reason to limit it to one only. Peter Wagner refers to it as your "gift mix," and maybe he is correct.

I don't put much stock in taking a spiritual gift inventory or test to try to figure out what your gift is. For one thing, the lists of spiritual gifts in the Bible are probably not comprehensive, so the tests may not even include your gift. Also, there is widespread disagreement on the definitions of the various gifts. Any inventory must speculate on the precise definition of each gift. So I don't find these tests very helpful.

(1) We discover our gifts by our desires and abilities.

Ask yourself, *what are my desires and abilities?* What do you like to do and are reasonably good at doing? I like to sing, but I can't carry a tune in a bucket, so that is clearly not my gift! There are other things that I can do, but I dislike doing them. If God wanted me to focus on them, I think He would give me satisfaction in doing them. Some things, by the way, we all need to do, even if they are not our specific gift. There are commands for just about every spiritual gift in the Bible. Knowing your gift shows you where to focus your time and effort.

(2) We discover our gifts by serving.

Some sit around trying to discover their gift before they get involved in serving. That's backwards. You will discover your gifts as you try various ministries. Get as much experience in different areas as you can, and in the course of serving, you will discover your niche, what God has uniquely gifted you to do.

(3) We discover our gifts by recognition from others.

Other Christians, especially mature church leaders, will recognize and affirm your gift. Paul mentions that Timothy's gift was "in you through the laying on of my hands." In 1 Timothy 4:14, he mentions that Timothy's gift was bestowed "through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery [elders]." Paul may have had special apostolic authority to impart spiritual gifts, or this may have been a public recognition of Timothy's gifts, affirmed by Paul and the elders laying hands on him in an ordination service. The modern application would be that others will recognize and affirm your gifts as they see you serve.

(4) We discover our gifts by effectiveness.

Do you see results when you exercise your gift? I remember being surprised when I first started teaching the Bible during my college days. People would come up to me, sometimes weeks later, and tell me that what I had said had helped them. I seemed to be effective in teaching. But when it came to evangelism, I saw very little positive response. Others would report how they talked to five people and all five accepted Christ. I would talk to five and see none respond. I'm still responsible to witness, but evangelism isn't my gift. So I concentrate on teaching, not on evangelism.

B. We develop our gifts by training and learning, and by the experience of serving with evaluation.

God graciously imparts spiritual gifts, but we are responsible to develop them. No gift comes fully developed, and the process of developing them is not automatic or effortless.

(1) We develop our gifts by training and learning.

Obviously, if God has gifted you to teach, you must spend time studying and learning the Bible, plus learning how to teach well. If you are gifted in evangelism, you still need training in various methods. You need to learn the content of the gospel. By the way, we all can benefit from the training offered by others in areas like evangelism, even if it isn't our gift.

(2) We develop our gifts by the experience of serving with evaluation.

This is a lifelong process. You should not only get involved in serving, but also, search the Bible to make sure that you are serving in accordance with biblical methods, evaluate your methods, and refine your approach as needed. Sometimes it is helpful to ask a mature believer to give you honest feedback on how you are doing. But, be open to what he (or she) tells you!

C. We must kindle afresh our gifts by exercising them, especially when it is difficult and costly to do so.

Paul tells Timothy to "kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you." The picture is of a fire and as you know, most fires will die out unless you tend them and add more fuel. There are several applications:

- (1) We may need to kindle afresh our first love for the Lord Jesus.

It's easy to drift into spiritual apathy or distance from Christ. The world crowds in, pressures keep us from spending time alone with Christ, and before we know it, we are in the spiritual doldrums. Don't let your love for Jesus Christ grow cold!

- (2) We may need to kindle afresh our gifts because of disuse.

Maybe you burned out by doing too much or you got burned in serving through criticism, so you quit. Maybe you've been on the sidelines so long that you feel rusty. Get back in the game!

- (3) We may need to kindle afresh our gifts especially when it is difficult and costly to do so.

Paul was in prison, with people attacking him. False teachers were perverting the gospel. If Timothy got involved, he would undoubtedly catch flak. Because of his timid nature, it was easier not to use his gifts. But if you only serve when it is convenient or when you feel like it or when you think it's safe, you really aren't serving God at all. We are bond-slaves of Christ, and slaves serve when their master calls them to serve, not when it's convenient.

By the way, while conversion is a radical change in which God imparts a new nature to us, He doesn't change our basic temperaments. Paul was basically the same personality after conversion as he was before. The same was true of Peter and of Timothy. As we grow, God develops the fruit of the Spirit in us, but He puts that fruit into our various personalities. You've got to know and accept who you are as God made you, and be aware of your strengths and weaknesses. Often your greatest strengths are at the same time the areas of your greatest weaknesses. Timothy was a sensitive man, which is a strength. But if you're easily hurt, it's a weakness.

Quite often, to serve God effectively, you've got to step out of your natural comfort zone and trust God to do something that is difficult. It often is difficult in terms of time pressures, but also it often is something that you just could not do in your own strength. I could not preach every week without trusting God. More often than not, each week I think, "I don't have a clue what to say about this text," even after I've spent quite a while studying it. Sermons

usually don't come easily to me. I have to spend hours working at them, usually with a lot of stress. I'm always citing Paul, "Who is adequate for these things?" Not I!

D. God's gifts must be exercised in God's way.

Paul mentions four qualities, one negative and three positive, which were specifically geared to Timothy's disposition. But, of course, they apply to us all:

(1) Exercise your gifts without timidity.

I used to enjoy the old Bob Newhart show, where he played an insecure psychologist. One of his clients was even worse than Bob, always apologizing for everything he did. When Bob would try to make him more assertive by telling him, "You don't have to apologize for everything," the man's response was, "I'm sorry!"

Timothy wasn't that bad, but he was not naturally bold. He shied away from conflict or confrontation. But the fact is, we're engaged in spiritual warfare and you don't win wars by being passive or cowardly. People will not grow in Christ and the church will not stand against the forces of evil if we do not overcome the fear of opposition and conflict.

(2) Exercise your gifts with power.

This is not the power of the flesh as seen in worldly assertiveness training. This is the power of the Holy Spirit, resting on the truth of God's authoritative Word. The aim of this power is not so that you can control others, but so that you can help them come under God's control, to conquer sin and heal broken relationships.

(3) Exercise your gifts in love.

Love balances power. It also is opposed to fear, because fear stems from self-love or self-concern or self-protection. Biblical love is concerned for the spiritual well being of others. Love for others will give you the boldness to overcome your fears so that you can speak to them about their need for Christ or their need to obey His Word. Love for God and others should be your motivation whenever you exercise your spiritual gifts.

(4) Exercise your gifts with discipline.

This word occurs only here in the New Testament, but a similar concept, self-control, is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). The nuance of the word used here is of a sound mind controlling your life so that you don't react in a sinful emotional outburst and so that you do not yield to impulses of the flesh. It means that you use the gifts that God has given you in a sensible, controlled manner, in line with God's purposes in each situation.

Conclusion

So Paul is telling Timothy, "Because you are saved, you must serve Jesus Christ." He has gifted you to serve Him, but you've got to discover, develop, kindle, and exercise your gifts. This does not mean volunteering to do some job in the local church, although it may certainly include that. Rather, it is an attitude or mindset, where you realize that because God rescued you from a life of sin and selfishness, you are not your own. You belong to Him and He has you on this planet to serve Him in some capacity. So you don't just dabble at serving when it's convenient. You're committed to serve Christ because He gave His life on the cross for you.

A pastor was trying to persuade a woman to teach a Sunday school class, but she kept giving him the same excuse, "I don't want to be tied down." Finally, the pastor responded, "The Savior was *nailed down* on the cross for you. Shouldn't you be willing to be *tied down* for Him for a few hours each week?"

But that pastor's words may convey the wrong idea, that you fulfill your ministry by serving a few hours each week. Rather, if Christ saved you, then you are His slave. You serve Him out of love, not out of guilt. But, you serve Him 24-7, always being aware of His great gift of salvation and that He has gifted you to help fulfill His purpose in His church and in the world.

Application Questions

1. Why must an awareness of salvation be the basis for any service for Christ? What problems may develop if we forget this?
2. Is it important to know what your spiritual gifts are? How does it help? Can it be a hindrance?
3. What is the difference between "volunteerism" and biblical ministry?
4. Is there a biblical distinction between "clergy" and "laity"? Is this a helpful or harmful concept?

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