

PAUSE & BE USEFUL

Week Five | May 21, 2017 | Better Together: Pause

PREPARATION

MONDAY THROUGH WEDNESDAY

Read through Ephesians 2:8-10; 1 Timothy 4:7-8; 2 Timothy 2: 19-21; Titus 2:11-12; and 2 Peter 1:3-4. Pray the Holy Spirit would bring to life the truths of this text and allow you to teach it well to those in your care.

THURSDAY THROUGH SATURDAY

Many questions have been included in this week's guide. Read through this lesson to determine which questions will work best to encourage, push, and grow your group.

DAILY

As you prepare, pray for the preaching of God's Word this coming weekend. Pray also for your time in this week's study.

OPENING PRAYER

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

We were saved in order to walk in godliness and be useful instruments to the Lord who works through our lives to minister to the world.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

In order to walk in godliness and be used by the Lord, we must be vessels who are "fit" or "ready" for his work. If we are not in this state, we must clean out the parts of our lives that are making us unfit, and walk instead in godliness and usefulness.

MEDITATE

"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)

GETTING STARTED

+ Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.

Have you ever heard an instrument at a musical concert that was unfit for performance? What did it sound like?

When someone says the word "godly," what comes to mind?

How does it feel when you try to use a tool that isn't functioning properly?

BECOMING USEFUL

There's nothing worse than going to a concert and hearing instruments that are unfit to be played. Perhaps there's a string missing on a guitar, or the horn hasn't been cleaned in quite some time. The musician, as ready and able as he is, can't get very far in his performance without an instrument that's ready as well. A good musical experience requires both the musician and the instrument be fully prepared, ready, and fit for the task of spreading musical enjoyment to listening ears. Unfortunately, the beautiful sound that the musician has already written beforehand can be jeopardized by a clogged or unfit instrument. The same goes for our spiritual lives with God. While God wants to do many things in us and through us—godliness and good works in particular—and has already planned them in advance, these plans can be jeopardized when we are not instruments "ready" to be used by him. Like the musician, everything on his end is perfectly prepared and planned. He is willing, able, and ready to use us for his glory to spread through the world. However, if he finds us unfit and unready for the task, we will unfortunately not experience how wonderful it is to be used by him in the world. In this lesson, we will explore what it means to be usable in the hands of God, and how we get there.

How would you make a broken instrument ready to be played again?

In what ways do you want to be used by God in the world around you?

■ ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

This week we will study how to pause and evaluate if we are fit and at our best, ready to be used by God. While it's easy to approach each day aimlessly, God calls us to be focused on godliness, interested in our usefulness beforehand, and self-disciplined in our choices. To further understand these concepts, we will look at three aspects of being good instruments in the hands of God:

1. PREPARED FOR USEFULNESS

2. PREPARED FOR USEFULNESS BEFOREHAND

3. PREPARED FOR USEFULNESS NOW

GOING DEEPER

+ *Use this section to prepare your heart and mind for the truths of this week. This section will help to introduce the focus of this week's lesson.*

PREPARED FOR USEFULNESS

■ ■ 1 CORINTHIANS 6:19, 9:27; 1 TIMOTHY 4:6-7; 2 TIMOTHY 2:19-21

Everyone who claims to be a Christian should do what? (2 Tim. 2:19)

What are the two types of "uses" a person can offer? (2 Tim 2:20)

How does one go from being dishonorable to honorable in their usefulness? (2 Tim. 2:21)

In 2 Timothy 2, Paul teaches us that believers are not saved and then put away on a shelf, but instead, they are vessels to be actively used in the hands of God. Vessels who stick to the truth of God's Word, avoid sin, and live out the gospel are those who are fit for honorable use. Vessels who stray from God's Word and sinfully live out their own selfish desires forfeit their opportunity to be used by God, making them dishonorable. As believers, we always want to be fully ready to be used by God. We want to be vessels in his hands used for honorable and helpful purposes in the world. Verse 19 helps us see what makes a vessel ready and helpful in the hands of God: departing from sin in

our lives. As we seek to run from the sin that we struggle with and cling to the gospel, we cleanse the vessel from the things that make it dishonorable, a lot like cleaning out the clogs of an instrument. As we pause to clean out the sin in our vessel, we become honorable again, “useful to the master of the house,” and ready for whatever purposes he has planned.

Being a good servant for Christ means training yourself in what? [1 Tim 4:6]

Why should we train ourselves in godliness, according to 1 Tim. 4:7?

Why is godly living important, according to 1 Cor. 6:19 and 9:27?

1 Timothy 4 shows us another aspect of being useful in the hands of God. Paul instructs Timothy that being a useful servant to Christ is of utmost importance. To be this kind of servant to Christ, we must train ourselves in godliness—a word that simply means “like God” or “like Jesus.” As Paul compares training one’s body to training one’s soul, he makes an important point: training your body to be as fit as possible will only last temporarily, but training your soul to be as fit as possible will have lasting effects. And who has the fittest soul? Jesus! So to train ourselves to the most fit and useful standard, our goal should be to actively become more and more like him! This is what the entire idea of “godliness” is about—be like Christ! And how do we train ourselves for something like this? Paul tells us the answer in verse 6: by simply “being trained in the words of the faith.” As we follow the Word of God, we will become more godly, and as we become more like Christ, we are more and more useful to the Lord.

1 Corinthians 6 and 9 also shed light on why godly living is important in the life of a Christian: one, and most importantly, because our lives and our bodies are not our own, they are God’s! We must remember that all of our choices—for good or for bad—will ultimately be accounted for before God. Two, godly choices are important because without discipline and self-control, we forfeit our influence and leadership within the church and our own families and communities. We’ve all seen too many national pastors and influencers disqualify themselves from ministry and lose their credibility simply because they did not have any self-control or discipline in important areas of life like marriage, family, alcohol, or sexuality. A life of godliness and usefulness is worth it first and foremost so we may give a good account to the Lord, and second, so we may stay in good relationships with those around us and not forfeit the influence God has given us. In these ways, we see that remaining in godliness has both vertical and horizontal benefits on our lives.

If your non-Christian friend asked what “godliness” meant, what would you say?

Share a time when your sin and ungodliness wounded your relationship with God and others in your life.

Share a time when avoiding sin and pursuing the Word of God had positive effects on your life and relationships.

PREPARED FOR USEFULNESS BEFOREHAND

■ ■ EPHESIANS 2:8-10 AND 2 TIMOTHY 1:8-9

What saves us, according to Ephesians 2:8?

Believers are called what? Why were we created? [Eph. 2:10]

When did God prepare the good works that we now live out? [Eph. 2:10]

Explain the role of good works before and after our salvation, according to Ephesians 2:8-10.

Ephesians 2 helps us see an amazing principle: God didn't just have our moment of salvation in mind before we knew him, he had all the moments after that in mind as well! In this passage, God calls us his “workmanship” or “masterpiece.” But unlike a masterpiece that simply sits to be stared at, we are a useful creation in the hands of God, living out his purposes on earth. Before we ever thought of God, he was thinking about what he wanted to do in and through our lives! The good works and godly habits that we walk in now are not random; they were intentionally preplanned by the Lord. In fact, they are the whole reason God made the masterpiece in the first place! This passage also helps us understand the role of good works and efforts in godly living: they do not save people; however, they

are a natural response of those who are saved. We weren't saved because we were godly, we are godly now because we are saved! In short, this passage shows us why we do not immediately go to heaven upon becoming a Christian: because God one, wants us to become more like Jesus in our lifetime, and two, has wonderful works planned for us to live out in the world!

God saves us and immediately calls us to what, according to 2 Timothy 1:9?

God's purpose for us after conversion is to live holy lives. When did God come up with this purpose for us [2 Tim. 1:9]?

While Ephesians 2 says that God preplanned our usefulness beforehand, 2 Timothy 1 sheds light on what "beforehand" means. Does it mean last week? On the day we were born? On the day we were born again? Amazingly, 2 Timothy 1 tells us that God prepared all of our holy living before the ages began. That's right! God had the good works we were meant to do planned not just before we were born, but before time itself began. This gives us great hope and confidence in our daily lives as we seek to live in a holy and useful way. As opportunities for us to live usefully reveal themselves day to day, we can know that they were crafted and planned by God himself. This truth also convicts us as well, knowing that if we are not ready to be used by God in any given situation, we are not simply turning down random opportunities, but instead, we are avoiding the opportunities that God himself fashioned for us. To avoid or be unready for the godly living that God has planned for us is to blatantly disobey the Lord. We should often pause and assess if we are doing this.

Do you view your good deeds and godly living as opportunities pre-planned by the Lord? Why or why not?

Explain how good deeds and godly choices relate to salvation.

PREPARED FOR USEFULNESS NOW

■ ■ 2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17; TITUS 2:11-12; HEBREWS 13:20-21;
2 PETER 1:3-4

What trains us to get rid of the ungodliness in our lives? [Titus 2:11]

In what “age” should we live self-controlled and godly lives? [Titus 2:12]

What grants us the ability to be godly, according to 2 Peter 1:3?

Of all the things we need in order to be godly in our present life, how much of them has God supplied? [2 Pet. 1:3] What are those “things” that help us be godly? [2 Pet. 1: 3-4]

The truth that God has prepared good works for us in the past gives us great confidence; however, the knowledge of this truth is not the same as actually walking out the plans of the Lord right now. As Paul says in Titus 2, godly living is not just something in the mind of God in ages past, but something we must live out in the “present age.” Godliness is for right now, this week. While God has planned out the ways he wants to use us, our cooperation in the matter is required. As we will see, it requires focus on grace and time around God’s Word. First, Titus 2 helps us see that we are trained to be godly by constantly looking at God’s grace. The Lord does not want us to train ourselves to be more like Christ begrudgingly, afraid of his wrath. Instead, he wants us to be motivated by how great his grace is. As we look to the gospel and see all that Christ did to protect us from God’s wrath and give us new life in his name, we want to become more like him. We will be godly, embodying his character and minister with a full heart to others, when we regularly look at all he’s done for us. We run from sin and walk according to Christ because of grace and grace alone!

Next, 2 Peter 1 reveals that the source behind godly living is found in God’s divine power. Though we cooperate with God and offer effort in our spiritual lives, we cannot muster up godliness all on our own! God’s divine power has given us all the things we need to live a Christlike lifestyle and fulfill the good works he has planned for us—knowledge of the gospel and God’s precious promises to us.

God equips us with what to make sure we do his holy will? [Heb. 13:21]

What does God work in us? [Heb. 13:21]

What resource are we given that makes us complete and equipped for godly living and good works? (2 Tim. 3:16)

Hebrews 13 shows us God has equipped us with every good thing to do his will and walk in his ways. While we may be tempted to make excuses for why certain godly decisions are too hard to make, we can run back to this promise and remember that God is not waiting to give us what we need, he already has! We can make decisions to be honorable instruments in the hand of the Lord right now, not lacking anything. Of all the things God has equipped us with, the most important is his Word. God promises us in 2 Timothy 3 that his Word is able to transform us into the godly person he has already planned for us to be! When we walk by his Word, we are totally complete on an individual level, and also fully equipped to serve the needs of others. Again, all of these promises are for right now. Right now, this very moment, we have everything we need to live godly lives and minister well in Jesus' name. God has presently equipped us with his grace, his divine power, his precious promises, and his Word. The only thing left for us to do is throw off the sin that easily tempts us and walk in all of these things he has richly provided us. As we do this, we will be ready to be used by him, living out the good works he has for us for today and beyond.

How can avoiding God's Word jeopardize our usefulness in God's kingdom?

NEXT STEPS

+ Connect the truths from God's Word to your daily life. Process how what you've learned this week will impact the way you live beyond today and into the future.

What sin do you need to "clean out of the vessel" in order that you may become more useful in the hands of God? How can you practically run from this sin this week?

How can you be more alert for the good deeds God has prepared for you this week?

Write out how the gospel changed your life, in your own words. Read it multiple times this week to focus on God's grace as your primary motivator for godly living.

What are some Scripture passages you can use this week to help you walk in godliness in an area that is difficult for you?

PRAY

+ Use these prayer points to connect your time in prayer to this week's focus.

God, help me remember that my life is not my own, but yours, and that I will give an account for my daily decisions, whether they are godly or ungodly.

God, help me see when your pre-planned opportunities for good works come into my life, and give me the power to walk in them.

God, lead me to precious promises in your Word that will empower me to live like Jesus.

God, remove anything in me that is keeping me from being useful in your hands.

CHALLENGE FOR THE WEEK

This lesson has taught us that God's people have been created by him and saved by him to be used by him. He wants to serve others and build his kingdom through our lives. In order for him to do so, we must be in a "usable" or "fit" state. Most of us rarely think about our "fitness" or "usability" level before the Lord, but take some time this week to do this:

Make a serious evaluation of your spiritual and physical health. Are you in a good state of readiness to be used by God? If not, then what are you going to do to become usable?

COMMENTARY

2 TIMOTHY 2:20-21: Paul uses an illustration to support his call to “depart from sin.” What is dishonorable include errors in a person’s morality and doctrine. Those who run from errors like this and avoid impurity in their lives prepare themselves to be useful to the master and ready for every good work. This is a promise of blessing in the pursuit of holiness.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:27: This verse is not directing Christians to punish their bodies as a means of spiritual discipline. Rather, Paul is pulling from his previous athletic analogy. Just as an athlete goes through physical training that is sometimes uncomfortable in order to attain the goal of victory, so Paul endures physical and emotional hardship (and also gives up his right to material support) for the gospel’s advancement. We, too, should be willing to endure these things for the gospel’s sake and practice self-control over our bodies and emotions.

EPHESIANS 2:8-10: Salvation is not by works. If it were, then those who are saved would get the glory instead of God. When God says we are created for good works, he means that our salvation is not based on works, but rather, the good works Christians do are the result and consequence of God’s new creation work.

TITUS 2:11-12: Christians should live these holy ways because the grace of God that saves us also instructs us to live in a new way. One cannot truly claim to be a recipient of “saving grace” without also being a student of “training grace.” This change in lifestyle is rooted in the gospel’s atoning work (v. 14) and the expectation of Christ’s return (v. 13). In short, the way we live now is based on what Jesus did for us in the gospel. The gospel’s effect on our lives is not just salvation, it reaches into all the ways we live from now till the day of Christ’s return.

**All commentary resourcing for Lesson 5 was provided by the ESV Study Bible Commentary Notes and the NIV Compact Bible Commentary.*

