

Lesson 9: Grow Up and Be Useful to God!

Text: 2 Timothy 2:20-22

Early in his career, Michael Jordan broke his foot and missed almost an entire season.

He could have coasted on talent, but instead, he used that setback to grow.

That off-season, he committed himself to training—lifting, conditioning, studying the game.

When he came back, he wasn't the same player. He was stronger, more disciplined, more focused.

That season launched his rise from potential to greatness.

The difference wasn't talent, it was growth.

And that's exactly what separates **spiritual potential** from **spiritual usefulness**.

Many believers have the background, the Bible knowledge, even the experience, but they've stopped growing.

They've been around church for years, they know the language, they have every opportunity to grow, but they've settled for comfort instead of maturity.

They're older, but not mature.

And that's the very issue Paul addresses here in 2 Timothy 2.

God has already given you salvation, His Spirit, and His Word, but He wants you to **grow** into someone He can use.

You may have potential, but are you maturing?

Are you developing the kind of character God can trust with His work?

That's what Paul is addressing here in 2 Timothy 2:20–22.

He's writing to Timothy, a young pastor trying to lead faithfully in a messy spiritual climate filled with false teachers and weak believers.

Paul uses the image of a **great house**, (God's household) and says there are different kinds of vessels in it.

Some are clean and useful. Others are dirty and set aside.

Paul's message is simple: *God wants to use your life, but He won't use a dirty or immature vessel.*

Main Idea: Be the Kind of Person God Can Use!

That's what every believer should desire—to be clean, growing, and ready for whatever the Master wants to do through them.

Listen, if you belong to Jesus, usefulness to God is expected.

You weren't saved to sit on the shelf. You were saved to serve, to reflect His character, to represent His kingdom.

But usefulness doesn't happen automatically.

It takes cleansing and it takes growth.

So how do you become the kind of person God can use?

How do you move from simply being a believer to being a *useful* believer, one whose life advances the gospel and honors Christ?

Paul answers that in this passage with two clear steps:

first, **clean up**, and second, **grow up**.

Let's start with the first.

Before God can use you publicly, He must first cleanse you privately.

1. Clean Up! (vv. 20–21)

2 Timothy 2:20–21 ESV

Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. ²¹ 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.

The “great house” is the **visible** church, and within it are people of varying usefulness to God.

What is the **visible** church? It's the local congregation.

There is the universal (**invisible**) church and there is the local (**visible**) church.

The universal church is made up of regenerate believers in Jesus Christ.

The local church is made up of professing believers in Jesus Christ.

Professing does not necessitate Possessing.

If we go back to verses 16-19, what do we see?

2 Timothy 2:16–19 ESV

¹⁶ But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, ¹⁷ and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸ who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. ¹⁹ But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

Paul is speaking of the visible church here and he is warning Timothy to be careful of those who **professes** Christ but do not **possess** Christ.

Look again at what Paul says in verse 19 - *"The Lord knows those who are his..."*

He is speaking about the local, visible church.

He knows who are His in His **visible** church.

We many not always know who His are, but He does!

And for those who are His in His visible church, they, according to this verse, are personally responsible for purifying themselves and walking away from evil.

The visible church is made up of two kinds of vessels (a.k.a. utensils, instruments, articles, etc.).

Some for honorable use and some for dishonorable use.

2 Timothy 2:21 ESV

²¹ 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.

Two categories - Intended for honorable use (Silver and Gold) or Permitted for sovereign use (Wood and Clay)

Intended for honorable use (vessels for "honor") - Silver and Gold

- These are the believers who cleanse themselves (v. 21) and are *"useful to the Master."*
- They are sanctified tools for God's redemptive and edifying work.
- This is the kind of usefulness Timothy—and every believer—is called to pursue.

Dishonorable use - Wood and Clay

Permitted for sovereign use (vessels for "dishonor") - Wood and Clay

- God, in His sovereignty, may still use even dishonorable people—though not for noble ends.
- This is not the *"usefulness"* of verse 21, but rather the broader sense of God's providence.

2 Timothy - The Art of Finishing Well

- Think of Judas ([John 13:18](#)), Pharaoh ([Rom 9:17](#)), or even false teachers ([Deut 13:1–3](#); [1 Cor 11:19](#)).
- They serve to test, purify, or display God’s truth, but they do not receive honor for their role.

So, when Paul says “*in a great house,*” he’s describing the **mixed nature of the visible church**: within it are true believers (gold and silver) and false or worldly professors (wood and clay).

This distinction that Paul makes was a necessary one for Timothy to consider as he pastored the church at Ephesus.

He should regularly help his people do what Paul says in [2 Cor 13 5](#)

2 Corinthians 13:5 ESV

⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

It is possible that you are here and you are not part of Christ’s church.

You may be a professing Christian without being a possessing Christian!

If this is you, today is a really great day to become a follower of Christ.

Maybe you are a possessing Christians, but you are not living your life in a way that is pleasing to Christ.

Maybe you need to move from dishonorable use to honorable use?

Maybe, as the test says, it’s time for you to clean yourself up?

To repent! and get back to your first love?

Maybe you need to heed the warning in [Revelation 2:4-5](#) that John gives to the church of Ephesus?

Revelation 2:4–5 ESV

⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

So, I have a question for you. What kind of vessel are you?

Are you one that Christ can use for honorable use?

- You cannot be both defiled and useful.
- Holiness is not optional for those who desire to serve God.

2 Timothy - The Art of Finishing Well

- God delights to use clean vessels, not perfect ones, but repentant and purified ones.

Think about a surgeon getting ready for an operation.

He scrubs in, the tools are sterilized, the room is spotless.

No surgeon would ever say, “It’s just a little dirt—it’ll be fine.”

Why? Because the smallest impurity could cause infection and threaten a life.

*The issue isn’t the value of the scalpel—it’s the **cleanness of the task**.*

In the same way, God doesn’t use dirty instruments for His holy work.

If you want God to work through you, you must be clean—not perfect but purified and set apart for Him.

- What needs cleansing in your life—sin, bitterness, pride, compromise, unhealthy relationships?
- Is there something or someone you need to separate from to be *“useful to the Master”*?
- Is there a hidden sin dulling your spiritual edge?
- Do you need to become a Christian? A follower of Christ?

God can use anyone, but He delights to use the clean.

In His sovereignty, He may use **a Judas** to accomplish His plan, but He desires to use **a Timothy** to advance His mission.

The question isn’t whether God will get His work done. The question is whether He will use *you* as an honorable vessel in the process.

Review:

Cleansing is the starting point, but God doesn’t just want you clean—He wants you **growing**.

2. Grow Up! (v. 22)

2 Timothy 2:22 ESV

²² So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Paul moves from **purification to maturation**.

It’s not enough to **clean up**, you must **grow up**.

Have you ever told anybody this?

“Oh why don't you just GROW UP?!”

I don't think this is Paul's spirit at all, however, the idea of growing up in Christ is throughout the New Testament!

Seriously, check out all the references for this...

The Call To GROW UP!

Ephesians 4:14–15 ESV

¹⁴ so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

1 Corinthians 13:11 ESV

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

1 Corinthians 14:20 ESV

²⁰ Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.

Hebrews 5:12–14 ESV

¹² For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Hebrews 6:1 ESV

¹ Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

How to GROW UP?

1 Peter 2:2 ESV

*² Like newborn infants, **long for the pure spiritual milk**, that by it you may grow up into salvation—*

Colossians 1:28–29 ESV

²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Philippians 3:12–14 ESV

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

2 Peter 3:18 ESV

¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

Galatians 4:19 ESV

¹⁹ my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!

How do you know if you are GROWING UP?

James 1:2–4 ESV

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Philippians 1:9–11 ESV

⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

1 Thessalonians 4:1–3 ESV

¹ Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;

Romans 12:2 ESV

² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Spiritual maturity is intentional.

The New Testament keeps telling us to *grow up in Christ*, to move from milk to meat, from instability to steadfastness, from childishness to Christlikeness.

2 Timothy - The Art of Finishing Well

God doesn't just want us saved; He wants us shaped into the likeness of Jesus Christ!

Once a vessel is cleansed (v. 21), it must now be *filled* and *put to use*.

So, Paul says...

2 Timothy 2:22 ESV

So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

The two verbs—**flee** and **pursue**—capture the rhythm of spiritual growth.

I call it, the Put off and Put on principle.

This principle for the Christian life is found clearly articulated in...

Ephesians 4:22–24 ESV

²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Here in 2 Timothy, Paul says to flee and pursue.

They are both **present tense imperatives**, meaning *keep fleeing* and *keep pursuing*.

Growth is not a one-time decision, rather it is a daily pursuit.

“Flee youthful passions”

Youthful passions (neōterikas epithymias) are not only sexual sins (though that's included).

Paul likely includes the full range of immature impulses...

Arrogance, argumentative pride, impatience, self-assertion, love of novelty, craving for recognition, and moral compromise.

It's as if Paul is saying, *“Timothy, don't let your ministry be marked by immaturity. You're the example. And challenge your congregation to pursue this as well!”*

“Pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace”

These four virtues summarize a balanced Christian character:

Righteousness – right conduct toward God and others.

Faith – steady dependence and reliability before God.

Love – self-giving service that puts others first.

Peace – relational harmony and unity within Christ’s body.

Maturity in Christ means you’re not just known for what you run from but for what you run after.

This is a significant thought! You can’t just put things off. You must put things off. You must run from sin.

But you must also run to Christ.

You must run after Christlikeness!

This is the goal of the Christian life, after all!

And notice the phrase **“along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”**

And please look at the last part of the verse...

2 Timothy 2:22 ESV

²² So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

With whom are we to flee youthful passions, and pursue righteousness?

Paul tells us clearly - *“along with those who call on the Lord...”*

In other words, fellow followers of Christ!

Paul is reminding Timothy that **growth happens in community.**

You can’t **mature** in isolation. Holiness is a team sport. The company you keep will shape the character you form.

1 Corinthians 15:33 ESV

³³ Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.”

or

Proverbs 13:20 ESV

²⁰ Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

Friends, I love you deeply, but some of you have been in Christ for a long time and still need to **grow up.**

You’ve walked with the Lord for years, but you’re still quick to take offense.

You’re cantankerous when you should be gracious.

You’re judgmental when you should be patient.

You're critical when you should be prayerful.

You're stubborn when you should be teachable.

Age doesn't always equal spiritual maturity.

It's possible to grow **old** in the faith without ever growing **up** in the faith.

Maturity isn't about how long you've been saved—it's about how much you've become like Jesus.

And the mark of maturity is simple: you respond more like Christ today than you did a year ago.

God's not impressed by how long you've attended church.

He IS concerned with how much you've been *transformed* by Christ.

And maybe it's time, out of love for the Lord and His people, to stop making excuses, to flee childish attitudes, and to pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Spiritual immaturity keeps many believers sidelined.

They know the truth, but they don't live it.

They can quote Scripture, but they can't control their temper.

They've learned a lot, but they've never applied what they know.

Maturity isn't measured by knowledge, it's measured by character.

It's not how much you've heard, but how much you've obeyed.

Paul's command to *flee* and *pursue* reminds us that spiritual growth always involves both **repentance and obedience**.

We grow by turning away from what hinders us and by moving toward what honors Christ.

Proverbs 13:20 ESV

²⁰ Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

Growth is contagious. Walk with wise, godly people, and you'll find your life pulled toward wisdom.

Surround yourself with foolish, immature influences, and their attitudes will eventually become yours.

Hebrews 12:14 ESV

¹⁴ Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

2 Timothy - The Art of Finishing Well

Mature believers work hard at peace. They're not easily offended, not quick to argue, not looking to win—but to love.

Holiness and peace walk hand in hand.

1 Peter 1:14–16 ESV

¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Growing up means refusing to return to the old ways of thinking, speaking, and reacting. The God who saved you is holy, and He's shaping you to reflect His character.

Have you ever tried to row a boat with just one oar?

You dig into the water, you work hard, but you never actually go anywhere—you just spin in circles.

That's what happens when you only flee sin but never pursue righteousness.

You confess, you resist, but you don't grow.

Spiritual maturity requires both oars in the water—fleeing what's wrong and pursuing what's right.

When both are working together, your life moves forward toward Christlikeness.

That's the picture Paul gives here—growth through motion in the right direction.

So let's bring this home.

- What youthful passions do you need to flee, anger, lust, jealousy, judgmentalism, insecurity, or that craving for approval that controls your mood?
- Are you intentionally pursuing righteousness, faith, love, and peace, or are you just trying to stay out of trouble?
- And who are you running with in the Christian race? Because spiritual growth rarely happens alone. The people you walk with will shape the person you become.

If you want to grow up and be useful to God, start walking closely with those who love Him most.

Review: Be the Kind of Person God Can Use!

Conclusion

2 Timothy - The Art of Finishing Well

God isn't looking for impressive people, He's looking for **clean and growing people**, those who are set apart for His purposes.

He delights in using ordinary believers whose lives are marked by humility, purity, and surrender.

You may not have the most talent, training, or influence, but if your heart is clean and your hands are ready, God can and will use you.

Charles Spurgeon once said,

"It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy Christian is an awful weapon in the hand of God."

— C.H. Spurgeon, *"The Power of Holiness," Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit, Vol. 54.*

That's what Paul is getting at here.

God doesn't measure usefulness by giftedness, but by godliness.

He works through those who walk closely with Him.

Picture the Master walking through His house, scanning the shelves of His servants.

Some vessels are dusty; others cracked with compromise.

But then He sees one—clean, ready, set apart.

He reaches for it and says, *"I can use this one."*

Friend, will that vessel be you?

Will you be clean enough for His touch, and mature enough for His mission?

That's the invitation of this passage—**to grow up and be useful to God.**