

USE ME

Tim Allen is one of the great comedians I grew up with. Mostly I saw him on a program called Home Improvement. Of course there is a double entente in that name. The show included his program that had to do with home remodeling and also his home life. The cast of characters was great - Wilson, the neighbor behind the fence, JT Thomas, the teen heart throb, and Al the guy who rocked a beard before they were cool. But to know this show is also to know Tim's fascination with Binford tools. Binford always had the bigger heavier duty tools. Here are some examples of the chain saw etc. They were massively over the top. And Tim when he did chose to use them seemed always to create a mess, break something and that was part of the gig.

I was doing some research over the most useful tools today. And this screwdriver is one that made the list. Philips, flat head, star and the like all in one tool how great. I saw a list of 50 tools which included a classic hammer, a level, electric cord. None of them were the Binford brand and I was glad that my garage had many of these classic tools. I don't know how many tools are in your garage, if you are like Tim Allen or not. But I did want to ask a question. *How valuable is a tool you never use?* Like this thing. I thought I needed it for a plumbing job, but it is shiny and chrome because it has never seen any use. How valuable? For me it's not worth the \$5 I paid for it, 'cause I've never used it.

I bring this up because what you may or may not know is that God has made us to be different, and to have different uses. The church is like a box full of saws, screwdrivers, and drills, levels, and electrical cords. And some of you are like Binford level - so powerful in the gifts that God gave. God tells us we are his craftsmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works. (Eph 2:10)

But the question is how valuable is a tool that is never used? Well it's not valuable at all. I might as well give this tool away because I never use it and don't know what it's useful for. Which is why I absolutely love a story Jesus told. The parable of the talents. God was giving away talents or bags of gold. To one he gave 5 bags - like that screwdriver with many heads could do many things. To another he gave 2 bags - like a hammer that can pound and remove. To another he gave one - like an electric cord one function to give power to everything else. And the first two people put the tools to use. And God praised them. Well done! You used what I gave you! Come share the master's happiness and be used for good purposes for all eternity. But then there was the one. Given a tool or talent of one. One use. And he never put it too use. God gets mad and says you wicked lazy servant. You could have put it to use. And he means to tell us - *A tool is only useful when put to use.*

A while back a personality test came out called Strengthsfinders 2.0. And it was able to deduce the tools and talents God gave to you. I still like it and recommend it. We've used it for our staff and our Leadership Team. But the premise that always sticks with me is that something is only a strength if used for the sake of others. If you have the ability or proclivity and don't put it to use, it's not a strength. You might as well not even have it. It's like a tool on the shelf.

Why this matter is we are concluding this series called Dangerous Prayers. I hope you have enjoyed it. It's a series that reminds us of the privilege of prayer, but also calls us up. To better, bigger and nobler conversations with God. We asked him to Make Us Bold, and to have us seek and do His will. But today is also a prayer that calls us out of the comfort zone. It's not a safe prayer. Our prayer is that he might use us for him.

Today we learn from the prayer life of Paul. Paul wrote most of the New Testament and he includes a lot of his prayer life. What is interesting is that you never hear Paul praying for earthly circumstances. He doesn't pray that Betty would get a job, and the George would return to health. He doesn't pray for a strong economy and safe travel. No his prayer life is exemplary. His prayer life is upper echelon and what he prays for is spiritual matters. Paul's pray requests influence my preaching. He asked the God's people to pray that he would preach clearly, boldly, and to share what is useful. I'm always seeking the same as well. But here we find him praying for Christians in the town of Colosse. His prayer is that they would be used, but I love exactly what he says so let's get into it. This section is on my heart because as a pastor I pray for others and time and time again people ask what they can pray for me. My default is this kind of request. Pray that I'm empowered by the Spirit to live a life worthy of being called a Christian, and more as a leader/pastor in the church I would live worthy of that calling. Could you turn to the person next to you and say, "Let's live worthy"

I don't know about you but when I am comfortable at home there are not many things that get me up. I can hear various noises like the washer or dryer ending a cycle, bumps and bangs from kids (no crying) we're good, a tv on or fan still on. I don't get up. The doorbell rings and if I wasn't expecting it, don't always get up. In fact now that the kids are older I don't have to get up even more often. Bella can you get Dad's phone, Nadia can you get Dad's computer. Having children is great! But there is one noise that is disturbing enough to make me get up. That is running toilet. If I hear the water running longer than it should with no one in the bathroom this is a noise that will force me to get up. The reason it is disturbing is because I still remember the time I was too slow. The toilet was running, and it was overflowing which led to water in the bathroom floor and finally everyone's favorite - water coming down from the ceiling. You ever been there? So a running toilet is enough to get me running.

Is there in anything in your life that disturbs you into action? Perhaps it simple as a haircut or color. Can't stand all that gray hair and burnt ends - time to go. Perhaps it's as grand as cause. I consider a very memorable group called. M. A. D. D. Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Candy Lightner was so disturbed over the death of her teenage daughter Carli that she had to take action. She had to do what she could so this doesn't happen to anyone else.

What I've found and why use me is a dangerous prayer. Is because *to be used by God, is to be disturbed by something wrong*. In our lesson Paul, "We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives." (9) Knowing what pleases God is knowing what displeases him. Bill Hybels coined the phrase holy discontent. And if you are praying Lord use me, don't be surprised if he gives you eyes to see something wrong. Something that no longer let's you stay comfortable, something is so disturbing it gets you up and drives you to action. It may mean a job change, an investment, giving more than you thought you could give. For you would do anything to scratch that itch and start solving the problem revealed to you.

Amazing Love was formed because we are disturbed. Some know our mission statement is *to Reach the Lost with the Love of Christ*. We were disturbed that there are people who are lost. By that neighbor, that family member, that household that is in the dark. The people who are crippled by fear, guilt and shame, and have no idea what's available. We feel it is a shame that not everyone knows the love, peace and joy Jesus brings - right now and for eternity. We feel disturbed that if everyone lives forever somewhere, that anyone would live forever in hell and not heaven. For there is a place where there is no more crying, mourning or pain. And admission to this place has been paid in full by the blood of Jesus and comes to all who believe. Everyone should know what's like to come out of darkness into wonderful light, and to have the peace of full and free forgiveness. For this came first to us and it's glorious, to be in the light and to be called the children of God.

The drum beat we've been marching to is drawn from a story Jesus told. Jesus said there was a shepherd with 100 sheep, and one got lost and outside the green pastures the others had been led to. So he left the 99, why because they were safe. They had plenty to eat. These were believers inside the church. But he left them, found the sheep, put it on it's shoulders. This is a picture of doing whatever it takes to reach the lost. Being like Paul who became all things to all people so that by all possible means he might save some. So what have we done joining the chamber, inviting a friends, putting the needs of others before our own needs. And this is something I've seen in you. How many friends invited, how many acts of selfless service. I love the holy huddle where on average we have 20 plus people all ready to serve others out of love for Jesus. This week planning for our next community event the March Expo and our Polling Place. And it's good. *Our church is disturbed by lost people*. And it should drive us to action.

But Paul's phrase that struck me was that of living worthy. To talk about it. I consider growing up as a pk or pastor's kid. There's a lot of pressure growing up to get it right representing dad, Pastor Blumer. I learned the phrases like you better mind your p's and q's. My mom would remind me of manners. Which is why there was one instance growing up that I was absolutely mortified. All the kids brother and sister were in the car together, and my brother just old enough to drive. And to put it mildly us three were not getting along. There might have been some yelling and hitting. And without tinted windows there behind us watching the whole thing were church members. I turn around and they are waving. And I'm so embarrassed - my dad's the pastor. So scared that they will call mom and dad to tell them how we are acting.

Now it's one thing not living up to the family name. But it's another thing not living up to God's. As believers we are his visible representation on earth. And the honest reality is that we don't always live worthy of the name. We misrepresent our God to a watching world. We don't live worthy. It's why we live in an age that says I like Jesus, just not the church or church people. Many times church people are the pastor's kids fighting in the backseat. Which is why I love the Savior. Which is why I love the cross. On the cross a new worthiness came. For on the cross the Son of God was considered unworthy of the Father's gaze. The reason God the Father turned away is because Jesus had become us. He had become the identity of sinful man. But in return God the Father now looks at us and sees Jesus. We have the identity of the Son. He sees us worthy and clothed with righteousness. *Only Jesus can make us truly worthy*.

But what would living worthy look like? Paul prayed, "live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God."10

I mean if the Father already see Jesus, what would it look like for those around us to see Jesus in us? Here Paul is talking about producing fruit.

At our house is a cherry tree. It's 3 years old replacing an Ash tree that died from Ash bore disease. And the bad things about this cherry tree is that it hasn't produced a single cherry. If it doesn't it's not living up to it's intended use. Jesus talks much about his disciples bearing fruit in the New Testament. In fact hear this account of when Jesus get's made at a fruitless tree. "Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered." (Matt 21:19) The Creator of the world getting mad at a tree. Is he really mad at not having a fig, or is he making a point for the attitude of God over things that were supposed to produce fruit that are not. If you don't take my interpretation at least take what Jesus brother James said. He picked up on this concept and said, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (James 1:22)

Which reminds me of conference syndrome. You know what that is? It's to spend three or more intense days gaining a whole lot of information and a neat little binder. Head-nodding, spine tingles and tears. Ureka - this is revolutionary. And when you get back you put the binder on the bookshelf and you know what you do - nothing. Some shelves are filled with these binders and absolutely no actions from them. The only action you have put in place is to schedule the next conference, where you can fill another binder with ideas you will never implement. If this is possible in the world. Do you think it is possible to be a Christian gaining knowledge upon knowledge. Yep I know that concept backwards and forwards. Christian marriage I submit to my spouse, give generously, forgive freely. So God reminds us to bear fruit.

So what kind of fruit is it that God wants? *To be useful is to produce fruits of repentance.* I don't know when the last time you realized it was, but it's God's goal that you and I would change. That you could continually be refined and conform to the likeness of Jesus. When we repent it isn't just that we are sorry, and isn't just that we're forgiven - it is also that we never want to fall into that sin again. I consider a woman Jesus met who had committed adultery. And while everyone wanted to stone and condemn her. Jesus did not. He said I don't condemn you, but also go and leave you life of sin.

I consider the testimony of Kanye West. Known for having impure music but through knowing Jesus he changed. He is known for warning his staff and production crew over the use of pornography or premarital sex. At home he is implementing changes for his kids and is very cautious what they view, and makes sure they don't have TV's in the bedroom. He says about his music, "I was letting you know what the Hennessy had done for me... now I'm letting you know what Jesus has done for me." What does it tell us. If you're in Christ he'll change you, it was supposed to happen that way. Ask the woman at the well, Zaccheus, Paul, and pretty much everyone who met him. Maybe you've seen how he too is changing or has changed you.

Other fruits useful to God? *To be useful is produce fruits of the Spirit.* What is amazing to me in this culture. Is that the most attractive personalities, the greatest workers, the type people you want to be around - is the type of people God wants us to be. When we consider the fruits of the Spirit Paul listed them this way, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." (Gal 5:22-23) Don't you like these kind of people. I heard recently a great

phrase. My mom was talking about some Christians she admires and she said that when they smile you can almost see Jesus. Could that be said of you? Because of your love, joy or kindness. I wonder which one of those you might need to dwell deep on. Is it a bit more gentleness if you're known for being harsh. Is it a bit more faithfulness if you are known for being unreliable. Is it self-control to let nothing have mastery over you no substance or bad habit. The fruits of the Spirit are empowered by that same Spirit and he can do it in you.

To close you have I wanted you to consider one of the greatest encouragements every given to our country. By a young man John F Kennedy. It was his inauguration as president in 1961. He gave a speech that lasted less than 15 minutes, but a speech whose impact is still being felt. He flipped the script. While most presidents run and get elected on what they are going to do for the people. All the promises for how to make their lives better. This is the culmination where he could say I'm going to do it for you life is going to get better. But he didn't say that. Instead of drawing their attention to what they wanted he said this, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." What?! That's not how this works, this ain't why you were elected. Your asking us to consider how we might make this country better? Yes.

I love this series because it flips the script of our prayer life. It calls us up. Pastor Craig Groeschel put this together and said, "Rather than asking God to serve us, what if we told God we are available to serve him?" What if the prayers stopped incessantly being give me, give me, bless me, bless me. But rather started by saying use me, use me. Make me bold along the way, and wise to know your will. And what if every Christian woke up with a different mission? The mission no longer to live for self, but to lose myself out of love for God and others. To put on my cap and go to work for God. To put myself down to raise another up. If we prayed that and did that you know what would be dangerous - the church. It would be an unstoppable movement of crazy good people. Let that be Lord and let it start with me. Amen.