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## The Dynamic of Spiritual Helpfulness

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

*Edited and supplied by the Golden Candlestick Trust.*

Reading: Phil. 3:8-17; Gal. 1:15-16.

What I have in my heart may be gathered up as the dynamic of spiritual helpfulness, the dynamic or the power, the motive force, of spiritual helpfulness. I prefer to say 'spiritual helpfulness' rather than ministry or service. If I were to say 'ministry', you would get that mentally into a category, and so you would if I were to say 'services', because service is something objective in our minds. So, rather than use either of those terms, I use this one - spiritual helpfulness. Spiritual helpfulness is ministry, is service, but before I speak to you about this motive force or dynamic as to what it is, let me just say a word about the value of a dominant desire to be spiritually helpful.

### **A Dominant Desire to be Spiritually Helpful**

It is a thing of tremendous importance and value that our lives as the Lord's children should be marked by a dominant desire to be spiritually helpful. We can at once challenge our own hearts and examine ourselves, interrogate ourselves, asking, "Is my life as a child of God really marked, characterised, by a dominant desire, not just a desire, not just wistfulness in that direction, not just a hope, but really a dominant desire to be spiritually helpful; that really such a desire holds me in its grip?" Is that so? If you are not able to answer that interrogation positively in the affirmative, to say, "Yes, that is quite true, I am, there is no mistake about it, no doubt about it!" If you are not able to say that, I would urge you to go to the Lord about that, because you yourself will not get very far unless that is so. That is the essence and sum of all that we are going to say, that we shall never get very far spiritually unless we are dominated by a desire to be spiritually helpful.

### **A Corrective**

Such a dominant desire will have many valuable effects and results in us, in our own lives. For one thing, it will always act as a mighty corrective in our lives. You see, no one who is really concerned for the spiritual good of others, no one who is really concerned to be spiritually helpful, will go very long with wrongs in themselves uncorrected. They will come up against the fact that all spiritual helpfulness lies under arrest while there is something wrong in themselves that is not being corrected. One of the things that amazes us, and may well amaze us, is that some Christians and so many Christians, are able to go on with uncorrected wrongs in their lives. The things are glaring to everyone, and they must be things that touch their own consciences from time to time, and yet the thing drags on, sometimes year after year; it is never settled. They do not square down to it and say, "Look here, the whole of my spiritual life and the whole of my spiritual helpfulness is held up because of this and it has got to be settled, it is going to be one thing or the other!" Many do not do that.

If we were really, honestly, truly concerned with this matter of being spiritually helpful, that sort of thing could not be, it could not continue. Uncorrected wrongs in ourselves would come up as issues upon which our very life in God hangs. The person who really wants to be spiritually helpful will keep short accounts with internal wrongs and will have no long outstanding controversies with the Holy Spirit or with their own consciences. It will be a corrective in this way. It is a false idea of spiritual life and spiritual work which is not going hand in hand with a check up on internal conditions, a setting right of internal wrongs.

Putting that the other way is that a genuine concern to be spiritually helpful will make us very watchful about our own spiritual walk with the Lord. That is very simple, but it is very true. A truly dominant desire to be spiritually helpful will be a corrective in our own lives all the time.

### **A Directive**

It will also be a directive, in this sense, that everything will be considered by such children of God in the light of our greater spiritual helpfulness or our spiritual value. We shall look at everything in the light of that. We shall weigh up everything, we shall decide everything, we shall make our choices, we shall adopt our courses, we shall fix our values, all by this - how far is this going to result in greater spiritual helpfulness, spiritual value? How much is the Lord going to get in me and through me by this or that step or course or attitude?

Take trial, adversity, suffering and persecution. By persecution I do not just mean that they stone you or you are burnt at a stake or something like that; the devil can persecute you and you can be persecuted in all sorts of ways. Now, our attitude towards those experiences, if it is the attitude which keeps in view greater spiritual value in our lives and greater spiritual helpfulness to others, then our concern to be spiritually helpful has very largely gained the victory over the adversity. I mean this - trial comes and difficulty comes. What is our first reaction? Is it to escape it, to be delivered from it, to be vindicated? It usually is the flesh's first reaction to suffering, to adversity, but I think the Lord would teach us this in His school, and He does teach us this as we go on in years. We are very slow to learn, we are very poor scholars, but we do learn as we go on through the years to begin to take an attitude like this: "Now, this suffering, this trial, this difficulty, has in it possibilities of some fresh spiritual values, it has in it the bringing of me to a place where I shall be able to help others as I have not been able to help them. I shall be more useful to the Lord if I get out of this what there is in it of spiritual meaning!" And so, you see, this concern to be spiritually helpful will be a directive in the sense that we are able to see the meaning of things, to see the possibility of things, and to be the master of them rather than that they should be our master and bring us down into defeat and despair.

Oh, this is a tremendously valuable and profitable thing in many directions, this concern for spiritual helpfulness. Well, do ask the Lord that you may be one who has such a master-passion, and that it may be kept always aflame and strengthened and deepened so that everything is governed by it, and everything is viewed in the light of it. Do not get making spiritual helpfulness a matter of this or that or any particular form and kind, but just the fact of being in a position to be of value to the Lord and to His children.

### **A Quest for the Lord Himself**

Well, having said that, we can look at what this dynamic, this motive power of spiritual helpfulness, really is. It is nothing else but a mighty quest for the Lord Himself; that is what it is. The motive power of spiritual helpfulness is not the work of the Lord, is not the service of the Lord. I say that very carefully after much thought, and I want you to think about it. I think that the majority of Christians think that the real strength of spiritual helpfulness is a passion for the work of the Lord, to be in the Lord's service, that in some specific sense, not just helpfulness, but what is called 'the work', 'service', so that the service becomes the motive power of life, and life is propelled by this tremendous activity in the things of the Lord. But that is not the dynamic of spiritual helpfulness.

The apostle Paul who does not come second in the matter of spiritual helpfulness, but stands in the first place in that matter, do you realise how much there is in his writings of the personal pronoun in relation to his own spiritual life? I, I, I, in a perfectly proper and right sense, not the ego being brought into view. He is saying 'I' so often. He connects it with his own spiritual life.

"I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8).

"I press on" (Phil. 3:14).

"I leave the things which are behind" (Phil. 3:13).

"I have not yet attained, I am not already perfect" (Phil. 3:12).

"This one thing I do" (Phil. 3:13).

You go through his writings again and see how he speaks of himself in relation to his own spiritual experience, and then note the second thing which runs side by side with that, that this in Paul's mind, Paul's heart, for himself and for those to whom he says these things, represents the very secret of spiritual helpfulness. He gathers it all up and says, "Brethren, be ye imitators of me" (Phil. 3:17). That letter to the Philippians is a letter written for the purpose of real spiritual helpfulness, and what a letter of spiritual helpfulness it is! But Paul does not write and say, "Now, look here, my friends, you must be doing this and that, you must be very busy and active and energetic in the work of the Lord. In this way you will be tremendously helpful and useful and valuable; if only you will do more, you will be more useful. If only you will be a little more busy in the things of the Lord, if only you will be a little more energetic in your activities, you will be more helpful; there will be a corresponding result in the spiritual life of others!" He does not say anything like that, and I do not think that Paul ever would have said such a thing. He would know that that is wrong, that is not true to experience. The busiest people in the things of the Lord are not always the most spiritually helpful, not always the most spiritually valuable. No, but Paul takes this line: a great master passion for the Lord Himself.

"I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ."

What a remarkable word that is - *gain* Christ. It is a master passion for the Lord Himself which is the dynamic of spiritual helpfulness and value; the Lord Himself, not His work, not His service. There are so many perils bound up with the work of the Lord becoming something in itself. No one will think that I would say a word to discourage you from always abounding in the work of the Lord. Do not think that that is what is meant here. If you apprehend rightly what I am saying, you will not be less concerned with the Lord's interests in a practical way, but there are so many perils bound up with the work, the service, becoming a thing in itself.

For one thing, if we get onto that level, into that realm, we shall very soon be living on a soul basis rather than on a Spirit basis. There is a great deal of gratification to us in doing a lot of things. Put that the other way round: how hard it is not to be doing a lot of things for the Lord! When our brother was speaking this morning about the second forty years in the life of Moses, I could not help feeling that it was the most difficult of all. The discipline of inaction is the most awful and terrible discipline that you and I can undergo, especially if we have active temperaments, energetic minds and if doing has a large place in our make-up. Long-drawn-out enforced inaction is an awful experience for our souls. It is starvation of our souls, for these souls of ours find so much gratification in doing. There is no appeal to us naturally, no appeal whatever along the line of it being more important to be than to do. How many of you respond to that? Naturally, none of us. I do not, naturally, "Oh, that is a melancholy philosophy of life! Let me be doing something and I will be happy, I will find delight in being alive, if only I can be doing!" That is one of the snares of the work of the Lord. We very soon get on to a soul level where what we think is the joy of the Lord is really gratification in being always able to be doing something which we think is worthwhile. Let that be suspended and then the test comes as to whether it is the joy of the Lord or soul gratification, and we very often go through a bad time while that transition from one to the other is taking place. This is uncovering ourselves, but it is true.

And so there are many other forms of peril when the work or the service of the Lord becomes something in itself.

Then there is the peril of business and being absorbed with affairs in relation to the Lord's work so that the on-high calling has to take a back place. The things are engrossing, we are inundated by all the thousand and one things of the Lord's work. We are caught, we have no time, we have no space, we are not able. These things are pressing, holding us too much, and experience teaches us in the course of life that Satan can use the work of the Lord against the Lord's highest interests. That is saying something very terrible. When the Lord has something in view in relation to the on-high calling, the real thing, the ultimate thing, the thing which matters to the Lord in us more than anything else, more than all that we can do down here, when the Lord has that in view, something in relation to that where we are concerned, Satan has seen to it that our hands are tied, our time is fully occupied. Hands are stretching out from all directions, either to keep us or to bring us away. We do not see that those very good things and those things which are for the Lord are being used against something of greater spiritual value, and it is because the work has become something in itself.

You see where Paul is in this. No man had more to think about and attend to in the interests of the Lord of a practical kind. But Paul is keeping first things first, main things in the main place, and everything for him is governed by this tremendous concern for the Lord Himself. I think it is a tremendously significant thing that Paul says these words here as we have them in this part of the

Philippian letter. Does he say, "Brethren, I am tremendously engrossed, I am inundated, I am overwhelmed with the things of the Lord, with this call and that call, this demand and that demand, I am tremendously busy every hour and moment of my life!"? No! He says, "Brethren, I press toward the mark, the prize of the on-high calling of God in Christ Jesus!" Now, I ask you, did that pre-occupation, that dominant concern with the highest and fullest things of God, with the Lord Himself and all that that meant, take away from Paul's spiritual helpfulness to others? Oh no, it did not, a thousand times, no! But it was the very dynamic of his helpfulness and it works out in this way. If you and I have our hearts set upon the Lord so that we cannot be satisfied with anything less than all that God means for us in Christ, it will work out to very real helpfulness and spiritual value to others.

Let me say that to my young friends. This is going to be the secret of any spiritual helpfulness. Of course, I am not speaking about any spiritual value or helpfulness in your life. I am not able to judge at all as to how much there is of that, that must be left for eternity to reveal, but I can see in the case of servants of the Lord and I just hope (that is all) that it may be true in my case, I see in many of the servants of the Lord that it was like this. They eventually, in the course of the years, became peculiarly helpful spiritually. Their lives represented something of extra spiritual value to the normal, to the average. They went a long way beyond so many more in what they were able to be of real spiritual helpfulness to others, and I look to see why, and I find that they were governed, perhaps from their early days, by a great passion for all that the Lord wanted, for all that was possible of the Lord Himself. It was not that they were so concerned about preaching and doing all sorts of things for the Lord, but in the midst perhaps of a busy and full life, there was something very much more than that. It was their own inner, secret walk with God in a real reaching out for God, a passionate reaching out for God behind it all. That is the secret, that is the dynamic of spiritual helpfulness.

Do not think of life in terms of how much you can do, in the first place. I do not want you to misapprehend this. Do remember that the Lord wants our lives to be fruitful and He would not excuse us from concern in a practical way for His interests, but do not think of life only in terms of how many things you can do, how busy you can be, how full your hands can be of activities, but let life for you, behind and beneath all that, be a matter of a great master quest for the Lord Himself, and you are most certain to come to the place of being spiritually helpful. You cannot help it, you are bound to be spiritually helpful, of spiritual value, if it is like that with you. So beware of getting things round the wrong way, and then Satan just defeating the main end by things which, being good and right in themselves, ought never to be things in themselves. The result will be superficiality along the line of perhaps quick returns. Oh yes, the things you are doing; you are very busy, very active, but they are superficial. The fruit is obtained quickly, but perhaps after a few years, where is it? How far has it gone, has it gone on at all? What does it mean of real value, gain, reproduction of spiritual measure?

When we come back to Paul again, look at the characteristics of this great man of God, and you will see that he was marked by an ever-enlarging apprehension of Christ. Galatians 1:16 is the beginning of that apprehension.

"It pleased God... to reveal His Son in me" - a basic apprehension of Christ, "that I might preach Him among the nations."

Out of an apprehension of Christ, he preached Him among the nations. It was a great apprehension, but it grew and grew. All through the years it was growing, enlarging, until you come to the end of those years in the Philippian letter amongst the last of his writings and here it is:

"...all things... loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord... that I may gain Christ".

The excellency of the knowledge, that kind of knowledge, that excelling knowledge. Here is the apprehension of Christ growing all the time. It is out of that that he becomes of real value. Life has to be like that. These are not just words. This must be true.

Let me say it again, forgive me for tiring you with reiteration. The measure of your value, your real spiritual helpfulness and of mine will be the measure of the growing apprehension of Christ, not the measure of our initial apprehension, something that happened long ago, but the measure of our growing apprehension. The Lord Jesus should, to you and to me, be continually becoming more marvellous and wonderful as to His significance, what He signifies in God's universe. Oh, it is just wonderful what the significance of the Lord Jesus is! Would that we could grasp that! I would like to write a library of books on the significance of the Lord Jesus. May the Lord give us that library in our hearts. But that is a mark of Paul.

And then, following that, there was that absorbing pursuit of that fulness which he was apprehending, of what he was seeing to be the meaning and significance of Christ in the universe of God. Not only am I seeing, he would say, but I am after it, I press on, I am going after it, I am on full stretch for that! That is a mark of this man's life.

And then, further, see the depth, the solidarity, the endurance of Paul's spiritual fruitfulness. You see, what we have of Paul, right down through the centuries, is not the work of Paul. The work of Paul was the churches for which he was used to bring into being; the evangelisation, the souls won for Christ, the churches scattered over the world then resultant. We have not got that now, they have all gone. Go to Ephesus today and see what you find. Go to Thessalonica today and see what you find as the direct result of Paul's work. Go to Asia and see what you will discover existing today that Paul planted. No, we have not got the work of Paul through the centuries. We have got the doctrines about which he wrote, but what bones of contention they are, what divisions there are over them, what schools there are on 'Paulinism'. Oh no, our value is not Paulinism today, a systematised doctrine of Christianity through Paul.

What have we got, what is it that is helping you and me today? What is it really that represents the real spiritual value of Paul, increasing through the centuries, and I venture to say, a far greater fulness and wealth today than at any previous time in these two thousand years? Paul means more today than he has ever meant of spiritual value, but what is it? If you will look right into the thing and not be superficial in your enquiry, you will have to acknowledge that it was Paul's spiritual life that gave rise to all this value.

The thing that helps us is Paul's spiritual life, not that Paul set up so many churches, not that Paul covered so much area and propounded such and such a doctrine. Yes, thank God for 'justification by faith' and all the other things, but this man has given us the essence of spiritual helpfulness by the life that he lived, because back of all that he did and back of all that he said, all that he wrote, all his doctrine, there was a man in full quest and in full cry of the on-high calling, and out of that came everything else. His doctrine came out of that. Oh, it is that every time!

What a cold thing the doctrine of predestination is, even with what Paul says about it in Romans and Ephesians. Oh, but let Paul come to you and say, "My brother, my sister, I have seen that from all eternity in Christ Jesus we are called and chosen unto some great purpose of God and my heart is set on that; come on, come with me, be an imitator of me!" And here is this man who will walk

before you and meet all the full force of hell, devils and men, and all the suffering, sorrow, disappointment, frustration and persecution. And you see him going on unflinching all the time, sometimes cast down, sometimes despairing of life, but nevertheless getting up again and going on, because he is governed by this quest for all the Lord's thought. That man helps me. It is not the teaching of that man, the doctrine of that man; it is not all the things he is doing. It is that man living triumphantly because of this passion in his heart for something that he has seen. This is where I get help, that is why I am always talking about Paul.

I am not just interested in Paul's teaching, it is the *man* who helps me. It is the spiritual life that that man lived that constitutes his spiritual helpfulness, and the heart and core of his spiritual life was the tremendous outreach for what he called the "on-high calling of God in Christ". Yes, his teaching and his work and everything else came from his spiritual life, and his spiritual life was what it was because he was set, not on doing things for the Lord in the first place, but on the Lord Himself, and as he was set on the Lord, he could not help doing things.

I think these things are important, don't you? Oh, let us ask the Lord to save us from getting jumbled up or the wrong way round in our judgments, our apprehension of values, and to get us like this, as Paul was, focused upon the Lord and all that He means in the purpose, thought and will of God, and always stretched out for the Lord's fullest, the Lord's highest, the Lord's ultimate, and through that to make us an inspiration to others, to make us really spiritually helpful to others, to bring into other lives an enlarging of spiritual horizon, clearing of spiritual vision, an inspiration to spiritual endurance. That is the way, the dynamic, the motive power, of spiritual helpfulness - a heart wholly set upon the Lord Himself, a life dominated by a great quest for all that God means in Christ for us.