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August 11, 2024

HEALING: ACTS 9:32-43

God invites His followers to be instruments of His power.

Focus Attention

Opening activity: Ask the group to share some phrases or words of wisdom they have heard like “In for a Penny, in for a pound.”

Opening Activity Option Two: Ask the group if they have heard some of the following proverbs and how they might be applied: “In for a penny, in for a pound.” “A picture is worth a thousand words.” “That’s a no-brainer.” “A rising tide lifts all boats.” “To eight-six something.” “All hat and no cattle.” “An accident waiting to happen.” (You can find more and their meaning at www.phrases.org/uk/meanings/american-phrases-and-sayings.html)

Explain: One phrase we might hear today is “You made your bed, now lie in it.” This phrase means “You must accept responsibility for the misfortunes you bring upon yourself.” (*Fandom-grammar.livejournal.com/99159.html*) We might use the proverb when talking to a young student who has failed to prepare for the final exam or the procrastinator who failed to start the science fair project early. In today’s lesson, we are going to find two people lying in bed. Their situations were a lot different from the unprepared student and it appears they did nothing to contribute to their current situation. Nor were they left to lie in their bed. They were not told to just deal with their situation. Instead, others came alongside them and acted as instruments of God’s power to move them from their bed to ministry.

Introduce the Passage and Transition: Today we are going to continue in our study of Acts chapter 9. The first part of the chapter focuses on the conversion of Saul (Paul). We will return to the life and ministry of this missionary to the Gentiles in chapter 13. Before Luke returns to Paul’s story, he relates some more about the early church in Palestine. This week and next we will learn more about the ministry of Peter. We will also see how the church is exhibiting signs of the Holy Spirit’s work and gifting.

1. MAKE YOUR BED (ACTS 9:32-35)

Read or have someone read Acts 9:32-35

Explain: After the death of Stephen in chapter 7 many of the Christians in Jerusalem fled while the Apostles stayed behind in the capital city. One of those who left the city was Philip. He ministered in Samaria for a while and saw a great revival take place. Luke tells us that Peter and John were sent to Samaria to witness the work of God among this group (8:14) Verse 25 of chapter 8 tells us that Peter and John returned to Jerusalem to give their report on the Samaritan revival. It also tells us that on their return they

Notes:

This is the Aim of the lesson. It drives our discussion and should be the point we drive home throughout the lesson.

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *New American Commentary: Acts* (NAC)
- *Holman New Testament Commentary: Acts* (HNTC)
- *Preaching the Word: Acts* (Preaching)
- *Exalting Christ in Acts* (Exalting)
- *Unstoppable Gospel*, Gregg Matte
- *Fandom-grammar.livejournal.com/99159.html*

TEACHERS NOTE: The ETB curriculum highlights the healing ministry of Peter in this passage. However, the Aim provided by the curriculum emphasizes the role believers play as “instruments of [God’s] power.” I will use the aim to drive the lesson and focus on Peter and the other believer’s role as instruments of God’s power.

Healing: Acts 9:32-43

were “preaching the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.” Acts 9:32 reveals that Peter did not stay in Jerusalem after reporting on the move of God in the countryside. Instead, he began traveling “from place to place.” Surely, he was preaching, but he might also have been visiting and encouraging the small Christian communities that now existed throughout the region. Luke tells us that he came to a place called Lydda. (If you use the ETB Leader Pack you can point out the location of Lydda on Pack Item 1) “Located on the Plains of Sharon a few miles east of Joppa, the town of Lydda was also known as ‘Lod’” (ETB LG, 124) “Today the international airport of Israel in Lod sits on a site very close to the ancient town.” (HNTC, 145)

While visiting the church at Lydda, Peter encountered a man “who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years.” Some say this man might have been a quadriplegic. (Preaching, 142) Luke does not reveal how the man became disabled. It could have been sickness or an accident that led to the man’s situation. We should take a moment and consider this man.

- He was probably one of “the saints who lived in Lydda.” This means he was most likely a Christian.
- He had been disabled for eight years. That means he was lying in his bed during the ministry of Jesus 5 to 6 years earlier. That means that while the great physician healed others, this man would have heard about it.
- Since he was bedridden, he was probably not one of those converted in Jerusalem. This means someone had come to his bedside and shared the gospel with him. We don’t know his emotional state when the gospel was presented, but it seems that he accepted the gospel message and believed in Jesus.

Activity: Ask the group to think of someone they know (or know of) who is not in a position to come to church where they will hear the gospel and experience the love of other believers. This person might be physically unable to attend because they are bedridden, homebound, or confined to a medical facility. This person might be encumbered due to an emotional reason. They might have been hurt by a church or by believers in the past. This person might be prevented from attending due to a spiritual reason. They might be so far from God that church isn’t even on their radar, and they do not consider church an option.

Provide group members with a note card or slip of paper. Ask them to write their name on the top of the card and the person’s name below. If they know the person’s address (or directions to their home) write it below their name. Explain that you will give the cards to the church’s visitation team. The team might contact the group member to see if they want to accompany a visitation team when they visit the person (explain

Notes:

“At Lydda, presumably in the Christian community, Peter found a paralytic by the name of Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years.” (NAC, 245)

Healing: Acts 9:32-43

they are not required to join the team). After the group members complete their cards, collect them. (You can deliver them to a staff member after your group time.)

Pray: Take a moment to pray for the people whose names were written down.

Explain: Peter encountered this bedridden follower of Jesus. We do not know why the Apostles acted, but through the power of Jesus the man was healed. "Assuming this story follows the pattern of Acts 3, the miracle attracted a crowd, and Peter preached the gospel to them. Thus, many people were converted (9:35)." (Exalting, 145) The miracles performed in the book of Acts were always signs meant to show the way to Jesus. The same is true today. Whether it is a physical healing, an emotional healing, or a spiritual healing the miraculous work of God is always meant to bring Him glory and thereby draw people to Him.

Summarize and Transition: As with the beggar at the temple gate, Peter could do nothing for the man. However, as an instrument of God Peter was able to bless the man as God healed him. Likewise, we are often unable to help others in bad situations. But we can give them the gospel message and express the love of God. Our Kingdom work will water the ground and draw them to Jesus. If they are receptive to the gospel and give their lives to the Savior, they will become instruments of God and draw others to Him.

Peter's work does not end with the events in Lydda. Another group of Christians in a nearby city heard of the events and while experiencing their own negative situation called on the Apostle. Let's look at that in the next passage.

2. DO NOT DELAY (ACTS 9:36-38)

Read (or have someone read) Acts 9: 36-38

Explain: In this passage, we are introduced to another disciple of Jesus. While the paralytic was getting up from his bed, Tabitha was laid down on a bed in death. Tabitha was a part of the church in Joppa. Joppa was a coastal town known by most Bible readers as the place to which Jonah fled to catch a boat to Tarshish. It is located inside the city limits of modern-day Tel Aviv. Upon the death of Tabitha, the Christians in Joppa washed her body and placed it in an upper room. It was not common practice to place the body in such a place. It *appears* that the Christians had high hopes when they called the Apostle to their aid. Before we examine Peter's role in these events let's consider Tabitha for a moment.

- Tabitha means "gazelle" as does her Greek name Dorcas.
- Luke's term for Tabitha, "female disciple," occurs only this one time in the New Testament.

Notes:

"Lydda was located in the fertile coastal plain of Sharon, which extends north from Joppa to Mt. Carmel. Luke said the people of the region turned to the Lord as a result of Aeneas's healing." (NAC, 246)

Healing: Acts 9:32-43

- “She was always doing good works and acts of charity.” Tabitha was a do-gooder. As we will see in the next passage one of her good works was to make clothes and robes for the widows of the community.

Explain: Later the Apostle Paul would properly explain the role of Spiritual Giftedness in the church. It appears before any theologian or leader codified the theology of the Spirit Tabitha was already living out her spiritual gifts.

Read Romans 12:6-8 (⁶ According to the grace given to us, we have different gifts: If prophecy, use it according to the proportion of one’s faith; ⁷ if service, use it in service; if teaching, in teaching; ⁸ if exhorting, in exhortation; giving, with generosity; leading, with diligence; showing mercy, with cheerfulness.)

“One hardly needs to stretch to see this woman utilizing her spiritual gift. Barnabas certainly had the gift of exhortation; Philip, the gift of evangelism; Saul, the gift of teaching; and here we see Dorcas practicing the gift of helps or service (Rom. 12:7).” (HNCT, 146) Tabitha had found her place in the church and she was diligent about working out her ministry calling. “Her busy hands carried out the plans of a loving heart.” (Preaching, 143)

Apply: Ask the group to consider their role in the local church. Are they serving in a way that makes a difference and is in line with their gifts, personalities, and skill set? If they are not currently working in a way to help advance God’s Kingdom, encourage them to ask the Lord to provide opportunities. Also, encourage them to seek out opportunities to do ministry work.

Optional Activity: Ask the group to list ways a person can serve in the church. You might write these on the board so that the group members have a visual image of the many opportunities for service in the church. (On the attached page you will find a sample list of opportunities.) After you make the list pray and ask the Lord to provide the workers needed by the church and that group members will say “yes” when they receive the call to service.

Explain: Tabitha was such an asset to the local church that her death left a gaping hole in the ministry and in the hearts of those to whom she ministered. Her work was so valuable they did not want to let her go. That is why they sent for the Apostle Peter. “The miracle at Lydda was certainly well-known in Joppa, so why not ask the great apostle to make a trip—at once. We find no certainty of expectation, but Luke’s description of the appeal certainly makes it sound as if they anticipated a resurrection... the text seems to imply they simply could not let a good woman like this depart from their Christian community. She had demonstrated godliness and servanthood; they desperately wanted her back.” (HNTC, 147) They were not demanding but expectant in their grief and desire for her.

Notes:

Healing: Acts 9:32-43

Transition: Peter had been traveling the region preaching and encouraging believers. His work in Lydda was well known. The church in Joppa needed both encouragement and the miraculous work that was associated with Peter. Let's see what he does after he receives the request to come to Joppa.

3. ARISE (ACTS 9:39-43)

Read (or have someone read) Acts 9: 39-43

Explain: In this passage, we witness movement from one place to another.

First, we see Physical Movement. Peter left Lydda and went with the men from Joppa. Peter and the men embarked on a "three hours journey by foot." (NAC, 247) Sometimes doing the work of God requires sacrifice and physical exertion.

Apply: Ask group members to consider the number of "free" hours they have in a week. Most will probably express that they have very few free hours. Remind them that time is one of the few non-renewable resources available to a person. Therefore, they must decide what is most important in their lives and the lives of their family. Ask them to consider building ministry time into their schedule so that they can be about the work of God and move according to His will.

Second, we see an Emotional Movement. When Peter arrived at the home in which Tabitha's body was resting, he encountered the results of her ministry. The widows showed him the clothes she had made for them. The text implies they showed him the garments they were currently wearing. The women were mourning the loss of a great servant and minister of the Lord. Peter then enters the room alone and through the power of God wakes her from death. Luke tells us that "He called the saints and widows and presented her alive." He does not tell us what took place when the saints and widows were reunited with this great woman, but we can imagine their mourning turned to rejoicing.

Third, we see a Spiritual Movement. This spiritual movement can be seen in several aspects of this story. To understand we must return to how Peter acted when the paralytic was healed. The man did not ask to be healed and he did not seek out Peter for his healing ministry. This can remind us of the way Jesus healed the lame man at the pool of Bethesda in John 5:1-16. In that episode, Jesus looked out on a sea of disabled people and picked His way across the crowd to one man. John tells us how Jesus interacted with the man: "'Get up,' Jesus told him, 'pick up your mat and walk.'" (John 5:8) Peter used similar words with Aeneas. He told him "Get up and make your bed." (Acts 9:35) When Peter enters the house at Joppa, he orders the room holding the body to be emptied of spectators. He then prayed and said, "*Tabitha koum*" meaning Tabitha get up or arise. Similarly, when Jesus entered the home of the dead girl in Capernaum, he emptied the room of everyone except her parents and his closest disciples. Jesus did not need to

Notes:

"But Luke was perhaps aware of more than a linguistic nicety. Jesus' words to Jairus's daughter were, "Little girl, arise," which Mark preserved in the original Aramaic form, '*Talitha koum*'" (Mark 5:41). In Aramaic, Peter's words would have been almost identical, '*Tabitha koum*'—only a single consonant's difference." (NAC, 248)

"Jesus' '*talitha kumi*' now becomes Peter's '*Tabitha kumi*'" (HNTC, 147)

Healing: Acts 9:32-43

pray as Peter did, but he did instruct the child to rise. Mark tells us in Mark 5:41 “Then he took the child by the hand and said to her, *“Talitha koum”* (which is translated, “Little girl, I say to you, get up”).” There is only one syllable difference between Peter’s command and Jesus’. While this difference is made possible due to Tabitha’s name, it is quite possible that Luke is helping us see that spiritual movement comes when we act like Jesus.

In both Lydda and Joppa many people came to faith because of the miracles and the miracles took place when Peter acted like Jesus. In our lives today, people will only come to faith through our personal ministries when we act like Jesus. We don’t mirror Jesus by healing the lame or resurrecting the dead. We mirror Jesus when we love the unlovable, care for the unserved, and share the gospel with the unrepentant.

We see one more spiritual movement in this passage, and it can easily go unnoticed.

Reread Acts 9:43 (Peter stayed for some time in Joppa with Simon, a leather tanner.)

Tanners were viewed as ritually unclean. In Jewish communities, Tanners were required to live outside of town and women were allowed to break engagements with men who revealed that they were tanners. The fact that Peter stayed in the home of a Christian man who was also a tanner reflects the changing attitude that was taking place in Peter’s life. As we will see next week, he was not yet ready to let go of Jewish purity practices, but we can see here that he is beginning to accept those who in the past he would have avoided. This change in his worldview marks a drastic change in Peter’s view of the gospel. Next week we will see that Peter will take the gospel to the Gentiles. His stay with Simon the tanner gives a glimpse of a changing man.

Consider: Ask the group to consider how our acceptance of others reflects or does not reflect our personal movement toward Christlikeness. Ask group members to silently consider who they might easily accept as a part of the church body and who they might resist accepting in their church. If their personal acceptance policy does not mirror that of Jesus, ask them to pray and ask the Lord to begin changing their hearts.

Summarize and Transition: In this passage, we see that Peter moved to where the need was. His actions helped move those in grief toward joy. Lastly, we saw that acting like Jesus can help us move people from spiritual death to spiritual life.

CONCLUDE

In both Lydda and Joppa Peter acted as an instrument of God’s power. Today, “God invites His followers to be instruments of His power” as well.

- We do this when we take the gospel to those who cannot or will not come to church. Just as someone took the gospel to the bedridden man in Lydda we are to take the gospel to those in the community who are not part of a church family.
- We act as God’s instruments when we utilize our spiritual gifts and serve in the church. The church is organized to minister and serve the community and the church family. It takes many people to do this. When we serve in the church with enthusiasm, we can have a Tabitha-sized impact on those around us.
- Lastly, we act as God’s powerful instruments when we set aside time and exert effort to do God’s will in the church and community. When we do this, we will move others toward Christ and His promised resurrection.

Conclude Encourage your group to find their place of service in the church and to actively take the gospel to those who need it.

Healing: Acts 9:32-43

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| Adult Small Group Leader | Sunday Morning Sound and Media team |
| Adult Small Group Assistant Leader | Worship Band Member |
| Children’s Small Group Leader and Assistant Leader (It takes at least 12 Adults to staff the teaching ministry on Sunday Morning) | Choir Member |
| Fellowship team Member (Wednesday night meals and other functions) | Greeting and First Impressions Team Member (including Children’s Ministry First Impressions) |
| Student Small Group Leader | Geaux Team Member (Visitation team) |
| Student Small Group Assistant Leader | Wednesday Night Kids Min team (teacher, asst teacher, activity leader, worship leader, large group leader)—It takes at least 25 people to staff the teaching and ministry aspect of Wednesday night Kid Min |
| Baptism Team Member | Cemetery Committee Member |
| Benevolence Committee Member | Decorating Team Member |
| Building and Grounds Committee Member | Church Use Committee Member |
| Stewardship Committee Member | Van Committee Member |
| Evangelism Team Member | Youth Team Member |
| Women’s Team Member | Discipleship Group Teacher/Leader |
| Bereavement Committee Member | Food Pantry Team Member |
| OCC Team Member | Lock Up Crew Member |