

5 Inspiring Lessons from the Life (and Death) of Dorcas

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“In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas)...” ([Acts 9:36a](#)).

Dorcas is mentioned only briefly, in the New Testament book of Acts. Yet she has been the subject of poems, paintings and even stained-glass art pieces. In the Catholic [faith](#), feasts have been observed in her honor, along with other women who were very active in ministry for the early church.

Why is there so much admiration for someone who only appears once in [Scripture](#)? Part of the reason can actually be found in the reaction of those that knew her, as they saw her illness and death. The story of this Godly woman offers insights for Christians who want to make a real difference in their communities.

Who Was Dorcas?

Dorcas, or Tabitha, lived in Joppa, an important port city overlooking the Mediterranean sea. She kept busy there as a seamstress, and her days were filled with activities that brought relief to the needy, especially widows.

The fact that so many gathered to mourn her hints at how well-known and respected she must have been. And it was the widows’ affection for her that led them to seek the Apostle Peter’s help. He may have responded to their pleas in part because he had heard of her important work for the Lord in that area.

The account of Dorcas is found in [Acts 9:36-42](#). It occurred when Peter was staying in Lydda as he travelled around the region encouraging “the Lord’s people” ([Acts 9:32](#)). He went to

Joppa to help Dorcas, and ended up staying there for a time to minister. Afterwards, Peter received a new vision to head to Caesarea, and left to continue on his journey.

Dorcas is one of several devout women who appear in the book of Acts. It's clear that Luke, the author, considered each of them worth noting. Two of them, like Dorcas, were successful businesswomen who also worked tirelessly to bless others and to glorify the Lord:

- **Priscilla** ran a tent-making business with her husband Aquilla in Corinth. But her greater contribution was as a teacher of the Gospel, as part of the Apostle Paul's missionary team ([Acts 18](#)).

- **Lydia** ran a lucrative dye business from her home in Philippi. She was wealthy, and used a good deal of her resources to support Paul's ongoing ministry. Lydia became the first convert to Christianity in Europe ([Acts 16](#)).

Others include **Damarius**, a wealthy socialite who was swayed by Paul's preaching in the Council ([Acts 17](#)), and **Mary** (the mother of Mark), who held early church gatherings in her home ([Acts 12](#)).



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What Was Dorcas Like?

“All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them” ([Acts 9:39](#)).

Dorcas' actual trade was sewing. But her most important tasks centered around giving practical help to people in her community by making clothing for them. “...she was always doing good and helping the poor” ([Acts 9:36](#)).

Her story reveals several characteristics she displayed. And the passage shows that Dorcas' motivation was to please the Lord and build His Kingdom. Dorcas displayed these traits:

- Industriousness
- Compassion
- Charity
- Selflessness
- Grace

The Apostle Paul's words seem to describe her mindset well: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters..." ([Colossians 3:23](#)).

Dorcas Raised from the Dead

"About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room" ([Acts 9:37](#)).

Though it's unclear what illness Dorcas had, it was serious enough to take her life. As she was being laid out for burial, the Apostle Peter arrived. Then, in the quiet room, he performed a miracle.

"Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet" ([Acts 9:40-41](#)).

This marvelous gift served two purposes in that moment:

1. To display God's glory: "Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord" ([Acts 9:41-42](#)).

2. To display God's passion: "...when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, 'Please come at once!'" ([Acts 9:38](#)).



5 Lessons From Dorcas' Life (and Death)

1. Use the Gifts You've Been Given to Help Others

Dorcas had talent in designing, tailoring and stitching. She put that to good use, making clothing for people who needed it. Any ability can be utilized to help others in a very personal and practical way:

- Cooking/baking for a neighbor who is laid up or sick
- Organizing a friend's garage or helping them weed through paperwork
- Writing a note of encouragement to a local teacher or first responder

2. Stay Faithful in Doing Good for Others

It doesn't say exactly what Dorcas did for the poor beyond clothing them, but she definitely made caring a habit. Over time she became very well-known and respected for this. It's easy to start measuring what we do in terms of large or small. But if we are consistent to reach out with a heart for ministry, God will increase the influence of anything we do.

“And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good” ([2 Thessalonians 3:13](#)).

3. Build Relationships That Will Have Lasting Impact on Others

When Dorcas died, she left a legacy. She touched many lives and made many friends. As the widows gathered, they cried for the loss of someone they valued. If we give thought to how we will be remembered, it might change our priorities now:

- Do we care about what God cares about?
- Do we seek to show agape love to those around us?
- Do we look for ways to connect with and support others?

4. Make Service and Ministry Toward Others a Priority

Dorcas was called a disciple, which means she was enthusiastic about following the teachings of Jesus. She knew that He called people to give, to care, and to provide where they could. We don't have to wait till we are rich or have it all together to start reaching out.

“For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” ([Ephesians 2:10](#)).

5. Let God Use You to Witness to Others

Dorcas had shown many people God's love. But her death and return to life pointed even more directly to the Lord. There was certainly great rejoicing when she was restored, as well as celebrating God's wondrous work. We have a chance to lead others to know God better through how we go through each day, especially difficult ones:

- Be an example of agape love in your community
- Be alert for practical needs you can help meet
- Be aware of prayer needs and faithfully lift them up
- Be ready to share your personal testimony

God has always gifted women to bring positive change to their surroundings, and Dorcas was obedient to that call on her life. She is still a wonderful example of what it means to submit our talents to the Lord, and to leave a legacy behind. And God will always multiply the blessings that come from our selfless giving.

“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” ([1 Corinthians 15:58](#)).

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