

Doing Good for Others

“In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor”

(Acts 9:36-37, *NIV*).

Someone asks you to give a reference for an associate. The question is asked, “Is your friend someone that is a giver in society (often doing good for others) or someone out to see how he can take advantage of others?”

Dorcas was well well-known for doing good, and helping others. When she became sick and died her friends, mostly widows, prepared her body for burial. Peter was visiting nearby, and was asked to come. He immediately came, and was escorted into the room where Dorcas’ body lay. Her faithful friends were weeping and wailing. What would they do now without anyone to care for them? They showed Peter the fruits of Dorcas’ kindness; clothes she had made for them. Peter asked the widows to leave the room. He knelt, prayed and spoke directly to the body, “Dorcas get up!” She opened her eyes, and sat up. He took her by the hand, and helped her to her feet. Her friends were thrilled to see her alive.

What is a Christian? *Guideposts* define a Christian in four ways:

- A mind through which Christ thinks.
- A heart through which Christ loves.
- A voice through which Christ speaks.
- A hand through which Christ helps.

“The Christian who is pure and without fault, from God the Father's point of view, is the one who takes care of orphans and widows, and who remains true to the Lord-not soiled and dirtied by his contacts with the world” (James 1:27, *TLB*).

A Christian should manifest the fruit of the Spirit. The list includes, among others love, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness. (See Galatians 5:22-23.)

Someone has said “It’s good to be a Christian and know it, but it’s better to be a Christian and show it.”

When was the last time you showed the world you were a Christian? What was the last unselfish act (act of kindness) that you did for someone else; something you did expecting nothing in return? Do you live your life in a way that people can tell you are a Christian without you telling them? Actions speak louder than words. Does the phrase, “Big talk, but no action” sometimes describe you?

Make Me Like Joe

Tony Campolo in *More Stories for the Heart* tells a story that beautifully illustrates doing good for others. Joe was a drunkard who was miraculously converted to the Lord. Prior to conversion he had gained a reputation as a dirty drunkard for whom there was no hope, only a miserable existence living on the street. Following his conversion to a new life with God, everything changed.

Joe became the most caring person in his local church. He did whatever needed to be done. This included sweeping the church, cleaning the toilets, or taking care of the children's Sunday school. He did each job with a smile, and a feeling of gratitude for the opportunity to help. He could be counted on to visit the homeless, witness to drug addicts, and to help those who wandered off the street and into the church. He took care of those who could not, or would not, care for themselves.

One Sunday morning, when the pastor was preaching an evangelistic message to the typical crowd, there was a man who stood, and came down the aisle to the altar. He knelt to pray, crying out to God to help him to change. The repentant man kept shouting, "Oh God! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe! Make me like Joe!"

The pastor leaned over and said to the man, "Sir, I think it would be better if you prayed, 'Make me like Jesus.'"

The man looked up at the pastor with a questioning expression on his face and asked, "Is he like Joe?"

God uses great preachers but he also uses those with the gift of kindness, the ministry of helps or service. (See Romans 12:7.) He uses ordinary Christians whose lives reflect His image.

Dorcas made a big difference in her community. She was an appropriate example of a Christian life yielded to service. Dorcas shows us a glimpse of what a Christian woman ought to be.

"In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" (1 Timothy 2:9-10).

"She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy" (Proverbs 31:20).

The Bible refers to her as a "certain disciple" (Acts 9:36). This is the only time a woman in the New Testament was ever referred to as a disciple. This is not to suggest that women are seldom referred as disciples, but to show the respect Dr. Luke had toward a life marked with unselfish service and sacrifice to others.

She was always doing kind deeds and helping the poor. It was her lifestyle. The *NASU* says, "This woman was abounding with deeds of kindness, and charity, which she continually did."

Dorcas loved God! Her love for God was also reflected in her genuine love and concern for others.

How Can You Identify a Disciple?

A disciple is someone who embodies the qualities of love.

"What does it look like? It has hands to help others, feet to hasten to the poor and needy, eyes to see misery and want, ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like." (Augustine)

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:16-19, *NIV*).

What we would be willing to do for God is determined by what we would be willing to do for others.

"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:34-40).

"The Christian who is pure and without fault, from God the Father's point of view, is the one who takes care of orphans and widows, and who remains true to the Lord-not soiled and dirtied by his contacts with the world" (James 1:27, *TLB*).

Vance Havner once said, "Too many Christians live their lives inside their heads; it never gets out through hands and feet and lips." Dorcas showed she was like Christ with her hands, feet, and lips.

"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

Dorcas was “full of good works” (Acts 9:36) like a tree that is full of ripened fruit. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* points out, “Many are full of good words, who are empty and barren in good works; but Tabitha was a great doer, no great talker.” The smallest deed done is better than the greatest intention. We should be full of good words, backed up by our good deeds.

“They were alms-deeds, not which she purposed and designed and said she would do, but what she did; not what she began to do, but which she did, which she went through with, which she performed the doing of...This is the life and character of a certain disciple, and should be of all disciples of Christ; for, if we thus bear much fruit, then are we his disciples indeed.” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary*)

You may ask, “What about me? I am a poor person, and have little money. If I give it to others I will not have any to take care of my needs.”

You break poverty by giving generously. Poverty is the fear of letting go of the little you have and that you will go without. The widow had only two small coins, but she gave all she had.

Jesus calling His disciples to Him, said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on" (Mark 12:43-44, *NIV*).

She could have excused herself from giving, “I am helpless! I am a poor widow lady.” But she gave what she had. Jesus never expects more from us than what we are able to give.

Dorcas was not merely commended for the money she gave, but for the deeds she did. It does not require money to do kind things for others. You can work with your hands, or walk with your feet, for the benefit of others. Dorcas was involved in making clothes. What talent do you have that can be freely shared with others?

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest” (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

When we obey God’s commandments we receive His blessings. His blessings are based on conditions, “I did! God did!” We do what God requires and He blesses us.

“For if you give, you will get! Your gift will return to you in full and overflowing measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over. Whatever measure you use to give—large or small—will be used to measure what is given back to you” (Luke 6:38, *TLB*).

"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples" (John 15:8, *NASU*).

Dorcas understood the promises of God’s Word.

“He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again” (Proverbs 19:17).

“He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse” (Proverbs 28:27).

In closing, let me share the words of a precious song:

“Doing good for others,
Who cannot help themselves.
Giving without thinking of return.
This old world of ours,
Would be a better place to live
If doing good was what we tried to learn.”
(*The McGruders*)

Study Questions

1. In the Book of Acts which lady was known for doing good for others? _____

2. What did the weeping widows show Peter when he came to the funeral at Joppa? _____

3. What did Peter say to the body? _____

4. How does *Guideposts* define a Christian? _____

5. According to Luke 6:38, what happens when you give? _____

6. Using the story as Dorcas as an example, what can be done with our talents? _____

7. Who is a Christian according to James 1:27? _____

8. How is a godly woman described in Proverbs 31:20? _____

9. According to Augustine, what does love look like? _____

10. What is poverty? How does one overcome it? _____

Additional Notes
