

*From Death to New Life*

Acts 9:32-43

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Have you ever heard the quote, “*There are no small jobs, just small people.*”? In this world of social media and social media influencers, overnight YouTube sensations, and celebrity culture, we can feel like we don’t make much of an impact. It seems like everybody wants to make a big splash, a big impact, and make a name for themselves. Everybody wants to be important.

Think about it this way, even our great state of Iowa gets overlooked. Iowa is an amazing state, but I have noticed that as a state, Iowa often gets overlooked. After all, we live in Iowa in the middle of fly-over country. Then, to top it off, Ames is in the middle of Iowa. So, we live in the heart of what is considered “*fly-over country.*”

Here’s the problem. We can laugh at this, but social media and celebrity culture can cause us to feel discontent. If we are not careful, we will begin to feel insignificant, overlooked, and simply ordinary.

If you are in college, you may look at your future and wonder how in the world you can make an impact. It can make you feel depressed. If you *are in junior high or high school*, you might be on Instagram or Snap Chat or TicToc and wonder if you can go viral. If you are in *college*, you are probably looking at your future and wondering if you can make good grades and land that big job that will give you the status you desire. If you are in *your adult years*, you may look at your life and think, “*This is it. This is my life. I am too far into this profession now to change now.*” If you are *older and perhaps retired*, you may look back and think, “*Most of my life is gone. There are more years behind me than before me. How can I contribute?*” We all will eventually fall into one of the categories and perhaps wrestle with these thoughts. We will all at some point feel ordinary and insignificant.

But I have got good news for you. One of Luke’s key themes that stretches from his Gospel to Acts is the Lord’s care and love for society’s overlooked, forgotten, insignificant, and ordinary. It does not matter whether it was a *young mother and her family, women, shepherds, Jews who were living in rebellion to the Mosaic covenant, tax collectors, lepers, or Samaritans*. Luke teaches us that Jesus did not come to spend time with the most important people in society and culture or the people who had the most to offer. Jesus came for sinners.

Now, let’s dig into the text by way of review. Then consider some take-a-ways from the narrative.

There is a shift in Luke’s narrative in v. 32. Chapter 9 begins with Saul’s conversation and ends with two stories about the Apostle Peter.

In v. 32, notice what Peter was doing. He was traveling “*here and there.*” This is an interesting phrase. It means he was going from place to place doing ordinary pastoral ministry with the saints. The Apostle Peter was in an obscure area of Palestine called Lydda, encouraging the saints in their new faith in Jesus. Lydda was a remote village about 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem. Lydda was not exactly the hotbed of ministry in Palestine. It was kind of flyover country in that day, and yet, *the leader of the Apostles* was in that small village going from house to house encouraging the saints and doing basic discipleship with them.

Then vv. 33-35 tells us that in this obscure village, Peter met a paralyzed man named Aeneas, who had been paralyzed for eight years.

Here is what we need to keep in mind. There were no hospitals to treat paralysis. No social safety net to help him. No physical therapy to help him learn how to work or develop a new kind of profession. No wheelchairs or wheelchair ramps. A paralyzed person was basically confined to a life of begging and depending on his family to take care of him if they would even do that. *Bottom line: to be paralyzed in that day was basically a death sentence.*

When Peter meets Aeneas, he says to him, “*Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed.*” Just like that, Jesus healed Aeneas.

Notice Peter didn’t say that he healed him, but Jesus healed him. Peter was careful that Jesus got the glory for healing Aeneas. *As a result, v. 35 tells us that many people in Lydda believed in Jesus but not only that, many people in the larger region Sharon believed.*

Word must have spread because 11 miles west, in Joppa, they had heard of what Jesus had done through Peter. Verses 36-37 tell us that in Joppa, there was a lady named Tabitha (aka Dorcas). Tabitha was a faithful saint, and she used her gifts of sewing to bless others and give glory to God. Verse 36 says she was “*full of good works and acts of charity.*”

Yet, this faithful saint died, and it broke the hearts of the saints and especially those who were close to her. It seems she was most likely part of a group of widows who served others and one another, and so her death simply crushed them. But, hearing that Peter was in Lydda, they sent word to him and asked him to quickly come to Joppa.

We do not know what they were expecting from Peter but when he got their message he left and went to Joppa. Which, by the way, was another obscure village in Palestine. When he arrived, the widows showed him all the things that Tabitha had made for them. He sent them out of the room, knelt down, and prayed, then turned to Tabitha’s body and said, “*Tabitha, arise.*” Immediately she opened her eyes and sat up. He took her hand and then called the ladies into the room and presented her to them alive.

*As word spread of how Tabitha was raised to life, many people in Joppa began to believe in Jesus. After that, Peter stayed in Joppa with Simon, the Tanner.*

*Luke wants us to understand that everything we do, no matter how big or how small, is to help people turn to and trust in Jesus.* So, here are a few principles to take away from these two stories:

## 1. Shepherding/Discipling one another helps the sheep trust in the Ultimate Shepherd—Jesus.

Look in v. 32. This is an easy verse to simply read and miss its significance because it sounds like a transitional sentence. However, it shows what the Apostle Peter valued—shepherding the flock. He was simply spending his days going from house-to-house visiting the saints and discipling them. There was nothing flashy about what he was doing. It was just daily discipleship. It was daily shepherding the flock of God. Peter was simply practicing what he preached. Remember what Peter wrote in 1 Peter 5:1-5:

*So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: <sup>2</sup> shepherds the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; <sup>3</sup> not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. <sup>5</sup> Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*

Yet, it is not only the pastors’ and elders’ job to shepherd and disciple. The DNA of a local church should be members of a local church learning to shepherd and disciple one another. We call this a culture of discipleship.

Oh, brothers and sisters, when we shepherd and disciple one another in the gospel with the word of God, *we walk in the steps of the Ultimate Shepherd of our souls—Jesus*. There is nothing insignificant about people who do this, and everything we do helps people to continue to turn to Jesus.

## 2. Serving one another helps us trust in the Divine Servant—Jesus.

I love J. R. R. Tolkien’s line from *The Hobbit*, where he talks about what holds evil at bay. Here is the scene: Gandalf was asked about what he will do to fight the powerful evil they were about to face. Gandalf replied,

*“Saruman believes it is only great power that can hold evil in check, but that is not what I have found. I found it is the small everyday deeds of ordinary folk that keep the darkness at bay, small acts of kindness and love.”<sup>1</sup>*

Tolkien was right. We live in a world where powerful evil is at work, and we can feel like we will never hold it back or stop it. We can feel like there is nothing we can do but the truth is

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<sup>1</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, <https://chiotsrun.com/2012/12/16/quote-of-the-day-gandalf/>.

we make a massive impact with small acts of kindness and mercy. These acts do not go unnoticed by our King, who is sovereign over all evil.

If you believe King Jesus only values us doing big things fast, then think again. Look in Acts 9:36-39 listen again to the story Luke tells us:

*Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. <sup>37</sup> In those days, she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. <sup>38</sup> Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay." <sup>39</sup> So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them.*

Tabitha was not a powerful woman. She was not an influencer with thousands of followers. She was a single widow living in a small, obscure village on the coast of the Great Sea. No one would consider her important.

Do you know who considered her small acts of kindness important against the powerful evil the saints faced? The saints of her church. Tabitha's small acts of kindness and love were a blessing to the saints and, in particular, the other widows with whom she lived in Joppa. She was a blessing to them.

Do you know who else considered her and her small acts of mercy important? The Lord Jesus. Her simple ordinary acts of service to her church did not go unnoticed. He saw them and loved them. Jesus sent Peter to restore Tabitha's life for a while longer so that she could continue to serve her church. Tabitha's restoration to life reminds us that the Lord considers no one's life and ministry insignificant or ordinary.

### 3. Ministering to the sick helps people turn to the True Healer—Jesus.

In vv. 32-35, Peter meets the paralytic, Aeneas, in Lydda and notice what happened:

*And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately, he rose.*

Peter heals Aeneas of his paralysis. However, this healing is not the main point here. The main point of Aeneas' healing is found in v. 35:

*And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.*

The main point is not the display of power. It is that Aeneas' healing validated the truth of the gospel so that people turned to the Lord Jesus. You see, the *Old Covenant* had come to an end, and the promises of the *New Covenant* had come. His healings validated the truth of the gospel found in the *New Covenant* established by Christ.

Think about it this way; the New Testament had not been written yet. They did not have the self-validating, Spirit-filled truth of the written gospel. It was coming, and they were indeed in the middle of writing the New Testament as they recorded these acts of power that pointed to the truth of the preached gospel. Until the gospels and the New Testament was written, acts of power were there to validate the New Covenant and point people to Jesus.

Bottom line: It is not acts of power that save people. It is the preaching of the gospel. Now, do not hear what I am not saying. I am not saying God does not display His power. I believe God still puts His power on display, but even when He does, those who see it must still hear about the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Witnessing an act of power will not save anyone.

It is the Spirit-empowered word of God that brings the dead to life, and you and I have the privilege to preach and share this gospel with others. People must hear the good news of Jesus Christ. *Everything we do is to help people to continually turn to Jesus.*

So, here is the deal, you will most likely never heal someone of paralysis or some other sickness. Now, don't get me wrong. I hope you do, and I hope many people come to faith in Jesus because of it.

However, here is what will happen. You will most likely get the opportunity to sit with those who are sick and perhaps someone who is paralyzed and serve them. I pray that your service to those who are sick is seasoned with the gospel. May you have gospel conversations with them, and may those who see you serve those who are sick hear you speak of the grace and mercy of the True Healer—the Lord Jesus.

#### 4. Serving the dying points people to the Giver of Life—Jesus.

In the same manner, we will most likely not raise someone from the dead or even resuscitate them to life as Jesus did through the Apostle Peter. We will, however, have the opportunity to be with those who are dying and point them to Jesus and also to be a witness to their doctors, nurses, and caregivers.

Like Aeneas' healing, the main point of Tabitha's life being restored is so that people will believe in the Lord Jesus. Look in v. 42:

*And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.*

When we have the opportunity to sit with the sick and the dying, may we make the most of our opportunities to have gospel conversations with them? May we point them to the One who is the Giver of Life—the Lord Jesus.

But why are practicing these principles so hard for us? *Why would we struggle to disciple one another, serve one another and serve the sick and dying?*

One of the reasons is that you and I may think these are insignificant ways to serve. You may think these things are beneath your pay grade. You may think you are too important to disciple a college student. You may think that taking meals to someone who is sick is not

important enough. You may think serving in some obscure ministry means people will not see your gifts and talents. We all want to do something where you can be seen and get some credit for your service.

I watched a few football games yesterday. After the games, do you know who was not interviewed—the offensive linemen or the defensive linemen? All the reporters wanted to do was interview the Quarterback or the running backs. No one wants to interview the obscure line.

Most of us do not want to be those linemen. Most of us want to be the quarterbacks or running backs, or wide receivers. Most of us do not want to serve behind the scenes. Most of us want to be noticed. Most of us struggle with the desire to be recognized and seen as important.

If this is you, here is what you need to do. First, you need to repent of the sin of self-righteousness and pride. Second, you need to realize that whether anyone ever recognizes you for your accomplishments that Jesus knows what you are doing. He is pleased with you and your simple ordinary service to the saints and your neighbors because it is this kind of discipleship and service that turns the hearts of people to Jesus.

I'm sure there are many reasons we will struggle with these principles, but one last one is probably our biggest struggle. Time. We *simply believe* we are too busy, or *we are literally* too busy to serve others. Whether it is by design or by accident, we have not allowed ourselves any margin in our lives to serve or disciple others so that people will turn to the Lord Jesus.

Now, let me give a disclaimer here. I know if you are a family with small kids, you only have so much time and some of you have hardly any at all. So, I am not trying to make anyone feel guilty. I simply want to highlight the fact that time becomes one of the reasons we struggle to serve and disciple others. If you are a family with little kids, you may have to get creative to disciple and serve others for the sake of the gospel. You may have to lower your expectations during this season of life.

For example, if you want to disciple college students, then you may have to invite them into the chaos of your family life and have gospel conversations over supper or folding clothes or mowing the yard. If you want to carry out acts of service or serve those who are sick and perhaps dying, you will need to find ways to build margin in your life so you can bless them. You might join the meal train for someone who is sick or a family who just had a baby. You might make a grocery run for someone who is sick. Perhaps you know a church member who is caring for a dying family member. Find creative ways to serve them. Help them with a doctor's visit, if you can. Let the doctors and nurses know you are praying for them.

Brothers and sisters, I don't think I have told you anything that is earth-shattering. I really did not mean to tell you some hidden secret to serving, discipling, and ministering to people in these ordinary situations. I simply want to encourage you to practice simple, ordinary acts of kindness and mercy so that people will turn to the Lord Jesus. That is really one of the

main points of this text. *The Lord Jesus values simple, ordinary acts of service that help people turn to Him in faith.*

Aren't you glad that the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, the King of Heaven didn't think that we were too insignificant, too obscure, or too unimportant to serve us by leaving heaven, coming to this earth, living a perfect, sinless life and then dying a cruel death on the cross for us so that by our faith and repentance we can be in heaven with Him for all eternity. Aren't you glad that the King of Heaven discipled a motley crew of men who came from obscure backgrounds and professions like fishermen, tax collectors, and one was even a former terrorist. These men took the good news of Jesus and began to teach, preach and disciple people of all walks of life, and we are the ones who have benefited from their ordinary ministry.

So, let me ask you, who is someone you need to be preparing to shepherd, disciple, serve or minister to? Perhaps it is a senior adult. Perhaps it is a widow or widower. Perhaps it is a single adult. Perhaps it is a college student. Perhaps it is a high school student or junior high student. Perhaps it is a young mom who needs your help.