

THE LOOKOUT

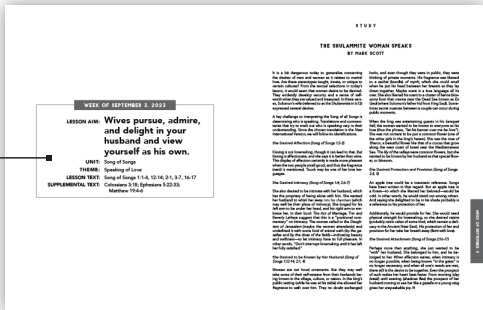
OCTOBER 2023

Unit: Acts (Part 1) Theme: The Church Begins

Overview: Since the creation of Adam and Eve, God has always had a people, but he has not always had a church. Even though the church was envisioned in the great commission of the Old Testament (Genesis 12:1-3), predicted by the prophets during a locust plague (Joel 2:28-32), and promised to the apostles at Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16:13-20), she was not actually born until the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-41). But after her birth, the church spread like fire across the Roman Empire. In this first part of our study of Acts, students will learn about that birth, how the early disciples shared their possessions with any who had need (especially widows), and how Philip the evangelist and Peter the apostle stretched that early church to be more inclusive.

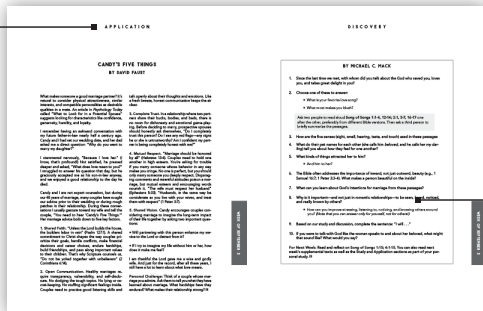
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Each page has a **tab** indicating the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF OCTOBER 29, 2023

LESSON AIM: **Look for ways to serve
in whatever way you
are gifted.**

UNIT: Acts (Part 1)

THEME: The Church Begins

LESSON TEXT: Acts 9:32-43

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 1 Peter 4:10-11

PETER SERVES IN LYDDA AND JOPPA

BY MARK SCOTT

Acts 9 highlights the two pillars of the early church, Peter and Paul. Most of the chapter tells about the conversion of Saul of Tarsus and some of his earliest ministry. The remainder of the chapter tells about the miraculous ministry of Peter. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, but he typically went to the Jews first when he arrived in a town to plant a church. Peter was the apostle to the Jews, but he used the keys that Jesus had given him (Matthew 16:19) to open the kingdom to the Gentiles (Acts 10:44-48).

The locations and details in this lesson matter. Peter used his gifts to serve the Lord as he had opportunity. Peter had the gifts of preaching, teaching, and healing (cf. Acts 3:1-10). In this lesson text, he made full use of that last gift, which was consistent with his later instruction to the church in 1 Peter 4:10-11.

Note the locations of these events. The apostles had stayed in Jerusalem following the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 8:2). But in time, they left Jerusalem and headed in different directions. Peter went west to Lydda (the Old Testament city of Lod). Then he was summoned to Joppa. That is where the prophet Jonah—recall that Peter’s given name was Bar-Jonah (i.e., Son of Jonah)—fled to board a ship headed to Tarshish. Jonah was hesitant about going to the Gentiles in Nineveh, and Peter was hesitant to go to the Gentiles in Caesarea (Acts 10:28). And Peter, upon arriving in Joppa, stayed with a *tanner named Simon*. This, of course, put him in contact with skins of various animals (some no doubt unclean). Both Lydda and Joppa move us one step closer to the Gentile mission of the church.

The Healing of a Paralyzed Man

Acts 9:32-35

As Peter traveled west, he encountered some of the *Lord’s people* (literally, “set apart people” or saints). This indicated the gospel message had preceded Peter’s arrival. In Lydda he found a man named *Aeneas* (a name meaning “praise or praiseworthy”). He was *paralyzed*, which caused him to be *bedridden for eight years*. Peter felt compelled to heal him, which is part of the larger impact of the work of Christ and previews the healing that all of creation will experience one day (Romans 8:19-21).

As Peter spoke with Aeneas, he first used an indicative verb and then an imperative. The indicative was, “*Jesus Christ heals you.*” This time there would be no question as to the

source of healing (cf. Acts 4:10). The imperative was, “*Get up and roll up your mat.*” The man did it *immediately*. This miracle was the impetus for a critical mass of converts in Lydda and Sharon. People *turned to the Lord* (a summary way of speaking of conversions; “believed in the Lord” will later be used in a similar way, Acts 9:42).

The Raising of a Dead Woman

Acts 9:36-43

Not far from Lydda was the seacoast city of Joppa, which today is swallowed up by the modern city of Tel Aviv. News of Aeneas’s healing reached the believers in Joppa. So, Luke shifted the scene to that city and to a woman who had died; her Aramaic name was Tabitha, and her Greek name was Dorcas. Both names mean “gazelle,” perhaps referring to being clear-sighted and coordinated. She is the only woman in the New Testament who is called a *disciple*.

But more significant than where she lived, or the meaning of her name, or the fact that she was called a disciple was that she was well known for her good deeds. The text says she was *always doing good*. She also remembered Jesus’ teaching to help *the poor*. She conducted a significant ministry to *widows*, which included being a seamstress for them by making *robes and other clothing*.

We do not know what the believers thought Peter could do in summoning him to Joppa from Lydda. Had Peter raised anyone from the dead before (cf. Matthew 10:8)? Was this among the “wonders and signs performed by the apostles” earlier (Acts 2:43)? Peter went with the two who summoned him. When Peter arrived in the *upstairs room* (mentioned twice in the passage), he found the typical mourning scene from the ancient Near East. People were crying and speaking kindly about the departed.

Peter sent everyone away, knelt, and prayed. What happened next was reminiscent of Elijah’s, Elisha’s, and Jesus’ resurrection miracles done in a private setting (1 Kings 17:21, 22; 2 Kings 4:32-35; Mark 5:38-43). Peter called Tabitha back to life. *She opened her eyes and sat up*. Peter helped her up, called the believers in—*especially the widows*, Luke notes quite tenderly—and *presented her to them alive* (i.e., caused her to stand). The result of Peter using his gifts? *Many people believed in the Lord*. May we use our gifts to achieve the same purpose. ■

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SERVE?

BY DAVID FAUST

Service has a sound. It sounds like snow shovels scraping on the sidewalk so aging neighbors will have a dry path to walk, and hammers pounding nails at a Habitat for Humanity building site. It's the screech of a siren as an emergency vehicle speeds to the scene of an accident, and the rustle of pages turning while a volunteer helps a first-grader learn to read.

Service has a fragrance. It's the aroma rising from hundreds of loaves of homemade bread my wife has baked and given away over the years. It's the smell of leaves raked from a shut-in's backyard, and the odor of motor oil when an amateur mechanic volunteers to fix his neighbor's car. Sometimes service smells like changing diapers in the church nursery or going on a mission trip to a city where raw sewage runs in the streets.

Service has a feeling. Often it feels uncomfortable—like the day I spent on a mission trip assisting a dentist in a Mexican village. My awkward efforts confirmed that God didn't call me to be a dental hygienist. But throughout the day, the dentist's skill turned painful problems into thankful smiles, and the dentist smiled too because she was doing what the Creator wired her to do.

Service has names. These names are words from the Greek language, in which the New Testament was originally written. *Doulos* ("slave") is used to reveal that Jesus "made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant" (Philippians 2:7). *Therapon* ("attendant" or "worshipper"), from which we derive "therapy" and "therapeutic," appears in Hebrews 3:5, which says "Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house." Jesus used *diakonos* ("deacon," "minister," "waiter," or "helper") when he said, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matthew 20:26). *Uperetes* ("assistant" or

"attendant") describes someone who does menial or lowly tasks. It was used for slaves assigned to row in the lowest deck of a ship. Paul used this term when he referred to himself and the other apostles "as servants of Christ" (1 Corinthians 4:1).

Service has role models. Daniel served with integrity and skill in the highest echelon of a pagan government. Jesus washed his disciples' feet. Tabitha (Dorcas) was "always doing good and helping the poor," and when she died, widows showed Peter the clothes she had made for those in need (Acts 9:36-42). Service looks like someone staying late to clean up after church dinners. It looks like kindhearted children who make sure no one in their class has to eat lunch alone. Service is visible in the volunteers who visit the sick and teach the church's middle schoolers week after week.

Service has a purpose. Joy and satisfaction come as side benefits, but we don't serve to impress others, to earn points with God, or even because it makes us feel good. As 1 John 3:16 makes clear, the fact Christ laid down his life for us motivates us to share his love with others.

Service has a reward. Jesus said, "If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple . . . that person will certainly not lose their reward" (Matthew 10:42). Admittedly, the world's needs seem overwhelming. You and I can't solve every social problem or mend every broken heart, but we can give cups of cold water for Jesus' sake. Everyone thirsts for a taste of God's goodness. Quenching that thirst—even for a moment—is one of the most rewarding roles of all.

Personal Challenge: Do a random act of kindness for someone else this week. **L**

DISCOVERY

BY DOUG REDFORD

1. Did you compile your “prescription for heart health” over the past week?
 - Which item on your prescription would you say is most urgent for you to follow?

Ask two people to read aloud **Acts 9:32-43** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. Try to put yourself in the place of Aeneas, paralyzed and bedridden for eight years—then miraculously healed and able to walk! What would be on your “to-do list” for your first day up and moving after eight years of paralysis?
3. When you think of “always doing good and helping the poor” (Acts 9:36), who (or what) comes to mind in terms of:
 - a person?
 - a ministry or nonprofit organization?
 - a special event?
4. David Faust describes some of the sounds and fragrances associated with doing good. What sounds and fragrances could you add, based on how you have seen others doing good in action?
5. The widows in Joppa showed Peter the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made when she was alive. What do you possess that someone made especially for you? (If there is a story behind that item, share it with your class or small group.)
6. What factors can keep us from doing good and helping the poor as often as we might like?
 - How can we lessen the influence of these factors?
7. Peter got down on his knees and prayed for Dorcas.
 - Have you ever gone to your knees in prayer for someone or during a time of great need? What were the circumstances?
 - What spiritual impact does kneeling in prayer have?
8. How do you think Dorcas’s ministry was affected after Peter raised her from the dead?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: “I will . . .”
10. Go back to the items listed in Question 3 under “always doing good and helping the poor.” Commit to helping a person, a ministry, a nonprofit organization, or assist with a special event this coming week in one of the following ways:
 - volunteering
 - financial support
 - encouraging note, email, or text
 - daily prayer (let the person or group know of your prayer commitment)

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Acts 10:17-24, 34-48** as we begin Acts (Part 2) with the theme, “The Church Goes Global.” You can also read next week’s supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■