

# WHO ARE WE REACHING?



## STUDY 3

### Reaching the Marginalised (Acts 9:36-43)

*"...the Bible says that God is the defender of the poor; it never says he is the defender of the rich. And while some texts call for justice for members of the well-off classes as well, the calls to render justice to the poor outnumber such passages by a hundred to one. Why? Rich people can certainly be treated unjustly, but philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff says it is a simple fact that the lower classes are "not only disproportionately vulnerable to injustice, but usually disproportionately actual victims of injustice. Injustice is not equally distributed." It stands to reason that the injustice is easier to perform against people without the money or social status to defend themselves."*

*Timothy Keller*

Joppa (modern day Jaffa) was the major port city for Judea. The disciples in Joppa were grieving the death of one of their own, Dorcas (her Greek name) or Tabitha (her name in Aramaic). Dorcas was a disciple in the early church who is known for her diligent care for the poor. We don't know, from the text, the full gamut of what she did but we know she made clothing, especially for widows. And we know that she loved well; the people she served were distraught with her death.

Sometimes we may be overwhelmed by the needs of others because we can't help everyone. However, though we can't do everything, we can each do something. Dorcas is one who found her something.

## Read Together:

**Acts 9:36-43 (NIV):** *'In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!" Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. 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. 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. 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. Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.'*

## Explore Together:

**1. Serving (Acts 9:36-39)** - Coming so soon after the extraordinary conversion of Saul, the short story of Dorcas might seem rather ordinary. NT Wright gives us a beautiful perspective about Dorcas, "...these are the people who form the heart of the church, while the apostles and evangelists go about making important decisions, getting locked up, stoned or shipwrecked, preaching great sermons, writing great letters, and generally being great and good all over the place. I am privileged to know plenty of Dorcas cases."

**Discuss:** Describe the characteristics of someone who quietly serves those who might, generally, be alone and ignored. How might we each begin to reach out to those who are on the fringes of society, often suffering alone?

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**2. Caring (Acts 9:36-39)** - Clearly, Dorcas loved well. We see this in the way she was loved by those for whom she had cared. Herbert Lockyer reminds us that, “When Luke says that Dorcas was full of good works, he meant the word “full” to refer primarily to her inward grace, which prompted the outward deeds.” Dorcas loved well because she was a disciple of Jesus, the One who was love incarnate. Dorcas cared for people so marginalised that others might not have even seen them! David Platt poignantly says, “There’s really only one thing worse than being lost. What’s worse is being lost when no one is trying to find you.”

● **Discuss:** The word “care” is about both BEING and DOING. How can we re-align our hearts so that our caring actions always come out of caring hearts? What are some warning signs that could tell us that our actions might look caring when our hearts aren’t, actually, caring?

**3. Rejoicing (Acts 9:40-41)** - There was an unspecified urgency to the situation when the two men traveled to Lydda to get Peter. Because her body was washed but not fully prepared for burial, the disciples may have wanted Peter to restore the life of Dorcas. Peter fully understood that healing power is found only in the name of Jesus and so... he prayed. And the life of Dorcas was restored. Imagine the scene as the weeping widows returned to the room and saw an empty bed with Dorcas standing before them, alive and well.

● **Discuss:** Share some situations when you have felt like all was lost, that your dreams and hopes were dead, and yet God made a way. Spend some valuable time with prayers of thanksgiving for the ways that God reached into your life and situation with loving hands of rescue, healing, and redemption.

**4. Believing (9:42-43)** - When someone faces the undeniable truth of who Jesus is, they must respond. How can they not respond with belief? Even when he hadn’t grasped all of the facts, the blind man who encountered Jesus said, in John 9:25, “One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” As word traveled about the resurrection of Dorcas, many believed. It is understandable that Peter remained in the area as the news of what God had done began to spread.

● **Discuss:** The impact of the healing of Dorcas was profound and far-reaching. Consider your own stories of healing — in physical health, from past addictions, from painful memories. In what ways can your story bring others to Jesus?

## Pray Together:

*Thank you, Father God, for Your faithfulness.*

*We see that You consistently meet each one of us at our point of need.*

*By Your Spirit, please work through our own stories of pain and redemption. Cause us to SEE and RESPOND to the needs of those who are living in extreme lack.*

*Use us, Lord, to represent You. Help us to show that You are the God who sees and hears and responds with love and solutions. Amen.*

### SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- **Book:** Timothy Keller - *Generous Justice: How God’s Grace Makes us Just*
- **Book:** Mark Mittelberg - *Contagious Faith: Discover Your Natural Style for Sharing Jesus with Others*
- **Book:** Herbert Lockyer - *All the Women of the Bible*
- **Book:** David Platt - *Something Needs to Change: A Call to Make Your Life Count in a World of Urgent Need*
- **Podcast:** The Bible Project - *Acts E3, Global Christianos*; <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/acts-e3-global-christianos/>