



EPHESIANS 2:10

CALVARY MURRIETA WOMEN'S MINISTRY

# LIFE LESSONS

FROM THE

# LADIES

R&R BIBLE STUDY 2017-2018



## ***LIFE LESSONS FROM THE LADIES***

### **Women in Ministry: Lesson 15**

This week we're going to take a look at a few different women who loved to serve. The great part is that they're all different ladies, with different gifts, different talents, and different callings. You've heard the expression "same same but different"? That truly describes them. Different, yet unified in their love for God, with a heart to serve others. The first lady we'll be reading about is someone I have always loved! When the Lord led me to write about her, my heart literally jumped for joy. Her name is Dorcas. I had never met anyone by that name until I was in high school. I ran track for St. Paul High, and at an invitational one weekend, I ran against a girl named "Dorcas DeWitty." I had never heard that name before but I still remember her. (I think she was 10 feet taller than me.) After I accepted Christ and began reading the Bible, I came across her name in Acts chapter 9. I was so surprised to find it! I wonder if she was named after our friend. I don't know why that name has always stuck with me, but it has. And my love for her character has grown over the years. Scripture only grants her 8 verses, but wow, are they the best ever! Can't wait for you to meet her. Ladies, meet Dorcas DeWitty. Oops, I mean Dorcas.

#### **First Day**

If you remember from our study in the Book of Acts, Saul, later named Paul, met the Lord on the Road to Damascus in Acts 9. He began his ministry like a wild horse, preaching and evangelizing. He worked in Jerusalem for a while, then the disciples sent him to Tarsus. Acts 9:31 tell us the churches all around "had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied." Now the focus swings back to Peter for a time. The door of the church was just about to be formally opened to the Gentiles. Peter, listening to the Holy Spirit, begins to move out.

1. Read Acts 9:1-35. What's Peter's first stop? Describe what happened there. According to verse 35, what happened as a result?

The primary purpose of the healing was to open the door for the Gospel and spread the name of Jesus! Peter continues on his journey, stopping in a place called Joppa, a city 10 miles northwest of Lydda. Joppa was a seaport town on the Mediterranean, in the tribe of Dan, about 45 miles from Jerusalem. Today it's called Jaffa. This city is important in the Bible because it's the city the prophet Jonah went when he boarded the ship to flee from God in Jonah 1:1-3. Jonah ran to Joppa to try to avoid **GOING** to the Gentiles, but here Peter is going to Joppa, where he eventually will get his call from God to **Go** to the Gentiles! And now we get to meet our new friend, Dorcas.

2. Read Acts 9:36-43. Observe and list the facts of this section. Who are the main characters, where is it happening and are there any repeated words or ideas?
  
3. What do we know about Dorcas?
  
4. What DON'T we know about her?

Dorcas in the Greek, or Tabitha in Hebrew, means "Gazelle." The gazelle is a beautiful creature, as well as a favorite way to describe beauty in the Orient. (See Song of Solomon 2:9, 2:27, 4:5, 7:3) The text tells us she is "full of good works and charitable deeds." This description is characteristic of how Luke, the author of Acts, writes. He often used the phrase "full of" as seen in Luke 5:12, Acts 6:3,5 etc.

5. What good works did she do?

I love that she was known for her good works. This beautiful lady died and the small town was grieving immensely. They appeared to honestly be heartbroken. They had lost someone who had shown them so much love and had become very dear to them. The problem: Dorcas died. The plan: Go get Peter! Perhaps they had heard what had just happened in Lydda, or just knew that Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, was close by and could do something. There was no evidence yet that the disciples had raised anyone from the dead, so they seemed to have a lot of faith in the power of the risen Christ to believe that Peter could actually bring her back to life.

6. Read Mark 5:34-43. Compare this with how Peter raised Dorcas from the dead. How are they similar? Different?
  
7. After Peter healed the paralyzed man in Acts 9:32-35, many turned to the Lord. How does that compare to what happened after Dorcas was brought back to life in 9:42?
  
8. Tomorrow we'll look deeper into the "good works" that she did, but so far, what application do you see for yourself?

**Memory Verse of the Week:** "At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did." Acts 9:36

### **Second Day**

#### **Work on your verse.**

1. Read Acts 9:36-43 again. What "gift" had Dorcas been given by the Lord?
  
2. "We must not perform our good works in order to be seen by men (Matthew 6:1), but men need to be able to see our good works" (Matthew 5:16). What does this mean? How is Dorcas an example of this?
  
3. What do the following verses tell us about "good works"?
  - a. Ephesians 2:8-10
  - b. Titus 3:5
  - c. Titus 3:8
  - d. Titus 3:14

4. Read James 2:14-26. In your own words, explain the relationship between faith and works.

You may be wondering why I'm having you read these verses, but it's so important to remind ourselves that salvation cannot be earned by good works. It's impossible. But good works are evidence, as well as a result, of a true and living faith. It's right there in the Bible, ladies. If your faith is alive and real, good works will follow. Acts 10:38 says that "Jesus went about doing good." Now ... how that plays out in each of our lives is obviously different. God Himself has created us, giving us unique talents and gifts, both natural and supernatural, such as in the gifts of the Spirit. Dorcas had a needle and thread and used it for God's glory. She wasn't a pastor, a missionary, or an evangelist, she was a woman who could sew. And sew she did! She obviously had a heart for widows, being one of the most needy and vulnerable groups of people at the time. Especially in the town of Joppa, since it was a seaport. Many wives probably had lost their husbands out in that sea, leaving behind poor, destitute widows. And Dorcas took it upon herself to help clothe them. In verse 36, the word "did" is in the imperfect active tense, meaning it was her "habit." She used her needle for the glory of God!

5. There is no work too small for God (Zechariah 4:10). What do you have in your hand that God wants to use for His glory?
6. Because it was her "habit" to do good, she must have been looking for opportunities to bless others. It had become part of her character. Do you occasionally do a good work, or are you "full of good works" like Dorcas? Is it part of your character? Do you look for opportunities?
7. From a human perspective, her "good work" was not huge or weighty. But the smallest acts of kindness are seen by God (Matthew 10:42). Can you remember a "small act of kindness" that was shown to you that made a HUGE impact on your life?

8. Notice in verse 36 the phrase “which she did.” So often we have great intentions and think about something “we should do” but never actually do it. Is there some “thing” that God has been calling you to do that you still haven’t?
  
9. I love that she was “known’ for her good works. What are you, or will you be, known for? Hmmm ...

I love what Mike Pittman wrote. He said, “Dorcas performed her good works while she was with them. (Acts 9:39) Opportunities for doing good are here today and gone tomorrow, so make use of them today while you have them. Opportunities are fleeting: to say an encouraging word to a weak believer, to try to help restore that brother or sister who has fallen, to go visit a person who has trouble getting out of the house ... there is no end to the list.” We only have a short time here on earth and we need to make the most of it, bringing glory to God.

10. What do these verses say about this?
  - a. Galatians 6:10
  - b. 1 Corinthians 10:31
  - c. Colossians 3:17
  - d. Ephesians 5:15-16
  
11. Dorcas had compassion for the sick, the poor, the oppressed, and the weak. Her compassion took on a practical work. She did her best, through the Spirit, to alleviate the suffering of others. How about you? When you feel “compassion,” do you allow it to move to empathy, which turns to action? Or do you “feel” it for a while and then just move on?

Wow, what a great example of service and ministry, right? I love her character! Her life speaks volumes to us. I pray that you really took the lessons from her life to heart, asking the Holy Spirit to show you two things: what’s in your hand, and how to use it for His glory.

### **Third Day**

**What’s your memory verse? Ponder it throughout the day.**

Today we have the privilege of meeting another sweet servant of the Lord, who is in a much different situation than Dorcas. She's a wealthy businesswoman who had a heart for God. Her "riches" didn't keep her from seeking the truth, and once she found it, she was quick to use it to help others. Ladies and gentlemen, (well, ladies), meet Lydia!

1. Read Acts 16:1-10 to get a little background first. Our focus has moved from Peter back to Paul and his travels. Please summarize what's going on in these verses.
  
2. Ok now we can catch up with Paul who thinks he's going to meet a man from Macedonia. He's in for a big surprise! Read Acts 16:11-15. Observe and list the facts you find. Who are the main characters? Where did our story take place?

Verse 11 tells us that they sailed a "straight course" and made it to Neapolis in two days. It was about a 150-mile trip and the wind was behind their backs. Later it's recorded they took the same course in the opposite direction and it took them 5 days. (Acts 20:6) The city of Philippi was about an 8-10 mile walk from there. Paul's usual practice was to set out and find the synagogue and try to share the Gospel with the rabbi. There was obviously no synagogue there in Philippi. Jewish law said there must be ten men before a synagogue could be formed. So on the Sabbath, Paul and his friends (Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke) set out to find where the faithful were praying. They came to the riverside (Our Riverside??) and found an unlikely group of worshippers. (This river is thought to be the Ganges River.)

3. Who did they find? Do Paul and his friends talk to them or shun them, like most Jewish men would do?

Lydia seemed to take her name from her native province, Thyatira, because it's ancient name was Lydia. Verse 14 tells us she was a worshipper of God. This means she was a Gentile who saw truths in Judaism and wanted it but hadn't "converted" yet. Most commentators believe that the other women with her were probably family and servants. They believe she

was wealthy because she was selling purple cloths and clothes, which only the rich could afford. The dye color purple came from a shellfish, the murex, or from a root of a plant, both rare and expensive items. Lydia was definitely a good businesswoman.

Paul takes the opportunity and shares the Gospel message, explaining who Jesus was and what He had done for them. Paul never seemed to miss an opportunity, however big or small. Funny that he thought he'd be speaking to a man in Macedonia, but God hurried him on with a headwind so he could meet up with a group of women, specifically Lydia. God is amazing. What an unlikely way to get a church started in Philippi.

4. What was her response to Paul's message as he shared that Jesus was the Messiah? (I would've loved to watch her face as she listened to the truth...)
  
5. What about her friends?
  
6. What was the first thing they did?
  
7. How did she show her gratitude to Paul and his friends?

The word "constrained" in verse 15 is the same word used to describe how the disciples prevailed upon Jesus to stay with them after their encounter on the Road to Emmaus. She was insistent! Lydia was hospitable, as well as influential. She continued to open her home to Paul and his friends, as we see in Acts 16:40. What a blessing it would have been to sit around the table and listen to Paul and the other disciples expound on the Scriptures and tell stories about Jesus!

Lydia obviously had the gift of hospitality. Right away she opened her home and allowed others in. I wonder how many others in their neighborhood she invited in over the years to share about Jesus and encourage in their faith ...

8. Lydia was wealthy, but she seemed to be very generous. Are you generous with what the Lord has given you?

Sometimes people think that it's wrong to be wealthy or successful. Not true at all! The Lord blessed Lydia with ability, wealth, creativity, as well as opportunity to do what she did. But we have to remember who gave us our wealth, and who it really belongs to. Deuteronomy 8:17-18 says, "Remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth."

9. What should the wealthy "beware" of? What types of schemes does the enemy use against those who are rich?

10. This verse tells us a bit about the purpose of wealth. Read 1 Timothy 6:17-18 and explain it in your own words.

We'll continue talking to Lydia tomorrow. In the meantime, think about the topic of hospitality and generosity and how the two are related.

#### **Fourth Day**

**Work on your memory verse. I think Lydia was full of good works too, don't you?**

1. Let's read our story again in Act 16:11-15. I love the example of a businesswoman being used by God. Her "business" opened up doors of opportunity for her, and she walked through them. Because of her "means" she could take care of traveling preachers etc. and help their ministry continue. Are you a businesswoman? How are you using "what you do" for the Lord? Do you see any opportunities through your work?

2. Can you, like Lydia, help ministry continue by your generosity? Be creative and think of some new ideas ....

3. What do Romans 12:13, 1 Timothy 3:2, and 1 Peter 4:9-10 say about hospitality?

4. Let's get creative again. What are some ways we can show, or be, hospitable, besides taking people into your home? (That's just the obvious one!)

5. Have you ever been the recipient of someone's hospitality? How did it make you feel?

After they left Lydia's house, Paul and his buddies made some people angry and got thrown into prison. (See Acts 16:16-40) An earthquake came as they were singing hymns, and their chains came off and the doors opened! The jailer and his household received Christ and got baptized as well! After all the commotion, they left the prison and returned to Lydia's house (vs 40). Wow, what a week!

6. Read Acts 16:40. Imagine being there at Lydia's house, listening to all the stories about what God had been doing, people getting saved, etc. What do you think it would have been like to be in that home that night?

R. Kent Hughes wrote, "Some church! Lydia the merchant, the Philippian jailer, and probably a few ex-inmates made up the first European church. The rich and the poor, the slave and the free, male and female, were all one in Christ! The flag of the Gospel was unfurled on a continent that need it desperately!"

7. It's so interesting to see how God works differently in people's lives to bring them to salvation. Lydia, a quiet one-on-one conversation, the jailer, a dramatic earthquake and miracle, and Paul, going blind on the Road to Damascus. What are the details of your conversion?

8. After you got saved, what was the first "act" of obedience that you followed? Do you remember?

9. Read Proverbs 31:10-31. This is kind of a “different” exercise, but see which verses describe Dorcas and her character, and which describe Lydia. Perhaps put them in two categories and list the verses that apply.

Tomorrow we will be looking at two more women who occupy only a few verses in Scripture but left a lasting mark on history! Get ready to be encouraged!

### **Fifth Day**

**Write out your verse by memory!**

1. Read Exodus 1:1-22. Why did the new king of Egypt want to afflict the people of Israel? What happened as a result, according to verse 12?
2. What are the two midwives’ names in verse 15? Have you ever heard of them? What were they asked to do? (Moses wrote Exodus ... why do you think he mentions them by name?)
3. Did they do it?
4. Why not, according to verse 17?
5. Did God honor their efforts to save the children? How?



Since there aren't many facts about these two women, there has been a lot of speculation. For instance, the fact that Pharaoh called for them shows that they were held in high respect, as most midwives were, among both the Egyptians and the Hebrews. They were known to have a great amount of skill and experience. Because of the number of the Hebrews at that time, they were most likely not the only midwives attending births. (In fact, we read in Numbers 1:46 that when the children of Israel left Egypt there were 603,550 men who were over the age of 20 years old. Many of these men were probably saved by midwives who refused to kill them as babies.) Many wonder if these were the midwives who attended the birth of Moses and saved his life. Is this why he mentions their name? Their job may not have been considered "grand" or as important as some, but to God they were obedient women who were faithful to their call and played a major part in moving God's plan forward.

10. Which of the women we studied this week ministered to your heart the most? Why?

I loved all the women we studied this week. Dorcas reminds me that there's no act of kindness too small to bless God and the importance of using my gifts to help others around me. Lydia reminds me to be generous and show hospitality to as many people as often as I can. And these two midwives remind me that we need to be brave at times to respond to the call God has on our lives. They are all heroes in my book!

