



Different Testimonies...Same Heart

The cost of a dozen eggs in 1953 was 39 cents—at least that was the price in rural Eastern North Carolina. As a little girl, I followed my grandmamma around the chicken yard and helped collect eggs from the hen house. Not necessarily my favorite thing to do—the chicken yard was dirty, muddy at times, and stinky with chicken droppings. Plus, the chickens often attacked or chased me! It was years later that I appreciated the experience from a much different perspective.

My grandmamma gathered

eggs for three reasons: to feed her family, to share with neighbors, and to sell. The money from selling her 39-cents-per-dozen eggs was placed in a special fund at our church that supported benevolent activities and mission endeavors of the Ladies Aid Society. Her "egg money" was important; it was a commitment to her Lord and her church. For her, it was a means of service. She was a farmer's wife with no outside career. Money was tight, and every penny counted, but the "egg money" was dedicated to the women's ministry.

My grandmamma served by faithfully giving (sacrificially, at times) to the cause of Christ to build His kingdom at home and around the world.

Granted, that was 68 years ago, and methods of giving to the cause of Christ in women's ministry have certainly changed. I neither gather nor sell eggs! I had a career as a teacher, so many times I just wrote a check. I tutor math students or teach piano lessons and deliberately set aside that money for missions projects. Service in God's work is different today, but I would suggest that while the testimonies of my grandmother and I are different, our hearts are much the same. When God intervenes in our lives and transforms us by His amazing grace, a heart of service to Him should be the automatic result. (Ephesians 2:10)

Join me as we consider two women in God's Word, Dorcas

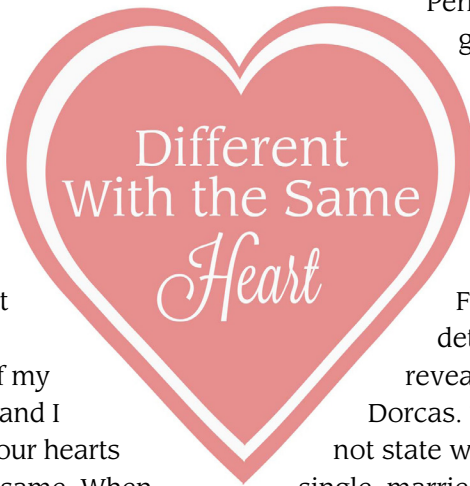
and Lydia, who served Jesus in different ways but had the same heart—to spread the gospel of Christ and to minister to those around them.

Dorcas (Tabitha) **Acts 9:36-42**

Notice this woman had two names: *Dorcas* (Greek) and *Tabitha* (Hebrew). In English, both names mean *gazelle*—a small, graceful, beautiful deer known for big brown eyes.

Perhaps her name gives insight into the beauty, grace, and compassion that characterized Dorcas' life. Few personal details are revealed about

Dorcas. The Bible does not state whether she was single, married, widowed, wealthy or poor, or whether she had children. Nor does the Bible mention her genealogy. However, verse 36 reveals she was a "certain disciple" and "full of good works and almsdeeds (good works) which she did."



Dorcas lived in Joppa—a harbor city in Israel that connected Jerusalem to the western world. The Greek name *Dorcas* may have originated from her residence in this seaport that was frequented and partially inhabited by foreigners who spoke primarily the Greek language.

It is reasonable to assume the city abounded in widows and orphans due to the loss of men voyaging the sea. These families needed help, but there were no welfare programs to take care of them. In fact, the world in that day was not very kind to widows who had no means of support or a family to provide for them.

Dorcas used her gift of sewing (by hand, I might add) to make coats and garments for the widows. In those days, ordering and purchasing materials, cutting, assembling, fitting, altering, and sewing garments, cloaks, and robes by hand were tedious and labor-intensive endeavors. She was personally busy doing charitable works for the poor, for whom she had active compassion and tender mercy. Dorcas had experienced a regenerated heart—the

source of her unselfish life and charity. She was not a Deborah, Hannah, Esther, public speaker, nor a missionary leaving her hometown. As a “certain disciple,” Dorcas served the Lord simply and humbly with the talent and gift she had—her sewing needle.

No doubt, in our churches, there are public-spirited women with humanitarian ideals engaging in various relief activities with the sole purpose of doing good. Unfortunately, some are not motivated by Christ. In trying to emulate Dorcas, they lack her Christian discipleship, forgetting that caring for widows and others in need comes from “pure religion,” which also is revealed in keeping oneself unspotted from the world (James 1:26-27). In Dorcas’ heart, God’s inner work of grace prompted her outward deeds—evidence of a truly converted person.

If not careful, we believers are sometimes self-centered, looking for some new religious thrill or spiritual experience, always looking inside and seeking blessing for ourselves rather than others. May our good works flow from a heart

grateful to God for His saving grace.

Sadly for the church in Joppa, Dorcas became “sick and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber” (verse 37). Grief prevailed. Dorcas died in the middle of her useful life.

Two disciples were quickly dispatched to nearby Lydda where Peter was staying. Surely he could help! Peter came without delay and found all the widows overcome with grief, “weeping and showing him coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them” (verse 39). In response, Peter sent everyone from the room, then knelt, and prayed to God. He turned to Dorcas and said, “Tabitha, arise.” God miraculously restored her to life, and Peter presented Dorcas alive to her friends.

Undoubtedly, a celebration ensued. Verse 42 closes this amazing story with the words, “And it was known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.” God used Dorcas’ reputation and her death and restoration to life as a means to share the gospel and call many others to Christ. I feel certain Dorcas was unaware of the magnificent work she was doing and of its far-reaching consequences. Her heart was committed and faithful to do what she could to minister to those around her.

Application:

When God intervened in your life and transformed you by His amazing grace, what heart of service became evident in your life?

Could you be described as a “certain disciple, full of good works”?



What are you doing in your place of residence? Do you see it as a place where God has placed you?

Is there a neighbor who is lonely and needs company? Or a neighbor who needs help with yard work?

What can you do at work or school this week? Is there some way to lend a helping hand, a sympathetic ear, or a caring, serving heart?

Are you doing good to all—or only to select ones or just those in your church?

Lydia
Acts 16:12-15, 40

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were on the second missionary journey and strongly desiring to go into Asia, but the Holy Ghost did not give permission (verses 6-7). Paul then envisioned a man in Macedonia pleading with him to come and help. Assured the Lord was in it, Paul answered the call, and set out on the journey. Surely they were excited to be called to a major city like Philippi, only to discover upon their arrival there was no synagogue.

Jewish law required the presence of ten males to establish a synagogue and apparently there were not ten God-fearing Jewish males in the whole city. But the vision was of a man calling for help. Perhaps Paul wondered, “Where is the man?” As a further complication, outside Philippi



stood arches inscribed with a prohibition against bringing an unrecognized religion into the city.

Verse 12 and 13 indicate they arrived and stayed for some time with seemingly no evidence that anyone was concerned about them or their message. If there were no synagogue, custom allowed Jews to find flowing water and establish a place of prayer where they could avail themselves of the cleansing rites the stream permitted. The Sabbath came, and Paul and his team went to the riverside for prayer.

Imagine Paul's surprise when nobody was there but a handful of women. All the men were absent. However, Paul was faithful and proclaimed the message of Christ to the women who gathered to hear. Lydia was among them. She came from Thyatira, a leading city of Asia, where the Holy Spirit had not permitted Paul to go. And here he found himself speaking to a woman in Macedonia—not a man as his vision suggested. God's plan is often different than we expect.

Lydia was a successful businesswoman, a *seller*

of *purple*, a merchant of expensive purple cloth from the well-known textile city of Thyatira. Purple clothing was the mark of wealth and royalty in the Roman world. To be dressed in purple was to say "I am somebody." It was highly probable that Lydia's trade brought her to Macedonia, and Paul's missionary travels brought him to Macedonia. But it was the Holy Spirit who brought them together.

Lydia is described in Scripture as one who "worshipped God". That did not mean she was a Christian. It is very likely she was a Jewish proselyte, God-fearing, and a believer in Yahweh, the name commonly used to refer to the God of the Israelites. She did not know about Jesus Christ. Note Lydia's response to Paul's message: she heard, and the Lord opened her heart. Lydia "attended" to the words of Paul, received the message, and trusted the Savior. Not only did Lydia believe, but all her household believed, and together they were baptized. The work of evangelizing Macedonia had begun.

Lydia opened her heart, and she also opened her home

(verse 15). Given her business, her home was probably one of the nicer ones in Thyatira. She shared and demonstrated the spiritual gift of hospitality. In verse 40, the missionaries lodged at her home. Her open house was a haven for the saints of God and a center of Christian fellowship in Philippi—perhaps the first Christian church formed in the city.

Application:


Is your home a secluded fortress or a haven for hurting souls?

How are you using your gifts, resources, and abilities?

Lydia “attended” the words spoken to her. Are you listening and being attentive to your spiritual journey?

Are you quick to allow the circumstances of life define your level of service to God?

What a lesson to be learned from these two women, Dorcas and Lydia. Obviously, they were different—different in culture, different in skills and talents, different in financial means, different in life experiences. Dorcas had a needle; Lydia had a business and a house.

God blesses and entrusts each of us with influence, talent, power, and spiritual gifts to glorify Him and build His kingdom. My grandmother and me, Dorcas and Lydia, you and those around you—our work and service for the Lord may appear quite different, but in essence, has the same heart to spread the gospel of Christ and to minister to those around us. 

About the Writer:

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She is the proud mother of two daughters, six biological grandchildren, three foster grandchildren, and one great-granddaughter. She enjoys spending time with family, reading, playing the piano, and serving in her local church.