

The Leader Dorcas

Series: The Early Days

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The Bible is filled with women who distinguished themselves in service to God. Who could forget the Judge of Israel, Deborah who along with Barak led the Israelites in battle? Or, Rahab who hid the spies sent by Joshua? Or, Jael who nailed Sisera Israel's enemy to the ground? Or, Abigail who prevented David from making a huge mistake? Or, Mary who willingly carried Jesus for nine months and gave Him birth? Or Mary Magdalene who announced the resurrection of Jesus to the disciples? Or, Lois and Eunice who instilled faith into young Timothy? Women were used by God in powerful ways to advance His kingdom purpose throughout history. We are indebted to them for their faithfulness and example. Who could forget the "virtuous woman" of Proverbs 31? She was blessed by her husband and her children.

I want to begin today before I introduce our heroine of faith by going to 1 Timothy 5. We saw in Acts 6 that often widows became dependent on the church family when they had no physical family to take care of them. Paul says widows can be put on a list for aid with these qualifications:

5:9 No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, 10 and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

Look closely at what Paul emphasized as the gold standard for older women in the church. Also in Titus 2 he gives these instructions to older women:

2:3 Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. 4 Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

Let's take a look at one of our spiritual ancestors, a woman named Dorcas, also known as Tabitha. Here is what we know:

Acts 9: 36 In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. 37 About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. 38 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!" 39 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. 40 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. 41 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. 42 This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. 43 Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

Dorcas provides us with a simple example of what it was like to be a woman in the persecuted and growing church of the first century. When women became Christians what did they do? Here are some observations:

- Dorcas probably did not learn to sew after she became a Christian. She probably had that skill and was making clothing long before she heard of Jesus.
- Dorcas was probably a good woman before she became a Christian, one who loved people and had compassion on the poor. She may have even served others because of her faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- Since she had a Greek name it is possible that like Philip and Stephen she may have been Hellenized in her culture, and had less prejudice toward Gentiles than Jews living nearer to Jerusalem. (I am struck by the fact that so many of the early leaders were like this.)

But with this being said, what example does Dorcas give our ladies on this mother's day?

- When you die make sure you have lived in such a way that your fellow disciples will want you to **keep on living**. (As opposed to being glad you are gone, or thinking you will not be missed.) Will you be missed? What will you be missed for? (Joya Elkins, Ella Moses, Diane Baber, Rena Lane, Barbara Soddors, Jean Pendegrass, Vivian Gillium)
- When you die make sure you leave **a testimony** behind. Dorcas' was "she was always doing good and helping the poor." In Acts 10:38 Peter said, Jesus "went around doing good." Jesus taught this in Matt.25:31ff.
- When you die make sure there is **something tangible** to show that you lived. . "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." What we leave behind may not just be material things like clothing, but the wisdom we shared, the example we set, the people including family and friends-we taught.

On this Mother's Day 2021 we honor all the women among us for your faith and your example.

Knowing that days like Mother's Day can be filled with conflicting emotions, it seems fitting to end with this blessing:

To the Moms Who Are

To the Moms who are struggling, to those filled with incandescent joy.

To the Moms who are remembering children who have died, and pregnancies that miscarried.

To the Moms who decided other parents were the best choice for their babies, to the Moms who adopted those kids and loved them fierce.

To those experiencing frustration or desperation in infertility.

To those who knew they never wanted kids, and the ways they have contributed to our shared world.

To those who mothered colleagues, mentees, neighborhood kids, and anyone who needed it.

To those remembering Moms no longer with us.

To those moving forward from Moms who did not show love, or hurt those they should have cared for.

Today is a day to honor the unyielding love and care for others we call 'Motherhood,' wherever we have found it and in whatever ways we have found to cultivate it within ourselves.

- Hannah Kardon, Pastor at Elston Avenue United Methodist Church