

GET UP STAND UP, STAND UP IN YOUR CHRIST

ACTS 9:32-43 MARCH 4, 2020

In this age, dominated by social media, you may have heard the term ‘slactivism.’ It’s defined as “the practice of supporting a cause by means such as social media or online petitions, characterized as involving very little effort or commitment.” Someone clicks a like button, or shares a link, maybe goes as far as changing the color overlay on their account’s avatar, and thereby declare to the world that they’re part of a movement, all without having to leave the house. It certainly makes the slactivist feel good as they convince themselves that they are “raising awareness” and voicing important concerns.

Pundits and researchers argue over whether slactivism or “armchair activism” (as it’s sometimes called) has any beneficial results. However, some individuals and groups that *actually work* to solve problems are snapping back. One volunteer-run, Christian disaster relief group called *Crisis Relief Singapore* launched a campaign a few years ago called “Liking isn’t helping” using real photos of people impacted by flood, war and earthquake. “The idea [behind the campaign] was simple: virtual things *don’t count* in real life, and even a billion ‘Likes’ on Facebook won’t help those facing crises in their everyday lives.”¹ Instead of giving a thumbs up, the ads carried this tagline: “Be a volunteer. Change a life.”

As Christians, we’re called out of the armchair and into the real world, to use actions and words as we serve as Christ’s Body. We’re invited to busy ourselves with real efforts to lovingly fill every corner of the earth with the knowledge of God. This has been the function of the Church right from the beginning. Acts records for us the start of the story that we’re still a part of today.

In verse 31, Dr. Luke had given one of his many assessments of the Church’s health and activity. He likes to take the vitals and add them to the chart every few chapters or so, and here’s what he wrote:

Acts 9:31 - ³¹ So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace, being built up and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, and it increased in numbers.

The violent wave of persecution, led by Saul, had passed. Now, things were peaceful. The Church was encouraged. It was being built up. It was increasing, not just in Jerusalem, but throughout the region. Having made this assessment, Luke spends the rest of the chapter giving us a few “for instances.” These aren’t the *only* things that were going on, but they were typical of the work being done in and through God’s people at the time. Our passage tonight will generally focus on Peter, he’s a main character of the book after all, but the book of Acts has made it clear that it wasn’t just 1 or 2 people who were accomplishing great things by God’s power. Almost *every* Christian listed so far has been a great example to us. Not just Peter and Paul, but Stephen and Barnabas, Ananias who lived in Damascus and the other believers in that city. Philip and the other guys chosen to serve. Tonight we’ll see not just *one* spiritual superstar, but multiple individuals who were used by God and whole communities of Christians who were full of the Spirit and making a difference where they lived by the power of Jesus Christ. We’ll see different ministries, different gifts, and we’ll be reminded that this kind of encouragement and building up is still the plan for us today.

¹ <https://www.boredpanda.com/liking-isnt-helping-crisis-relief-singapore/>

As Luke showcases these examples for us, he keeps using a particular word over and over again. For us, it's translated as: "Get up," or "arise." We'll see it 5 times in 12 verses! It's used toward people *receiving* ministry and toward those *doing* the ministry. And, though it's a common term, it's hard not to think that Luke was trying to get us thinking about getting up and going about the Lord's business. When you read (5 times tonight) "get up" or "arise," it's a term that means to awaken, recover, begin an action. It's the same word used when we're told that Matthew "got up" and followed Jesus when the Lord said, "Follow Me!" It's the same word Jesus used in the Garden of Gethsemane when the disciples kept falling asleep and He came to them, saying, "Get up and pray."

The Bible beseeches us to stay awake, to stand firm, to be on the move and tonight we see pointed examples of how the Church was up and walking in remarkable ways.

Acts 9:32 - ³² As Peter was traveling from place to place, he also came down to the saints who lived in Lydda.

Some commentators feel that this is when Peter was traveling home to Jerusalem after being in Samaria, which we saw back in chapter 8. Others think it was a later time. Remember: the last passage covered a decade of Saul's life. We're not sure, but what we *do* see is that, while Peter doesn't seem to have some ultra-strategic plan of attack (he's just going 'place to place'), he had made a plan to minister. That's what he set out to do.

He reminds me here of a honeybee out looking to do his job. Sometimes we can make very definitive plans for ministry with specific targets and specific goals. That's great. When that's not happening, go about your business, flower-to-flower as it were, with a plan to minister. That's not a job just for Apostles. As we've seen, this was the mindset of all the Spirit-filled Christians. They were, of course, ready for those surprise, Divine appointments when they came up. In the mean time, they behaved as workers ready to plant and harvest and be used place to place, even if they were on their own.

Acts 9:33 - ³³ There he found a man named Aeneas, who was paralyzed and had been bedridden for eight years.

It's not clear whether this man was already a believer or not. What we know is that he had been living through a long period of significant suffering. And, the way Luke writes it, Peter finds *him*. It comes across as if Peter took the initiative to reach out to this guy. And that's a great encouragement for us tonight. Each and every one of us can think of *someone* who we could reach out to in some way. Whether that's reaching out with compassion or with a presentation of the Gospel or with some act of generosity, maybe prayer. We know there are all sorts of ways to demonstrate the love of God, so we should be "finding" someone and asking the Lord to use us for His purposes in their lives.

Acts 9:34 - ³⁴ Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and make your bed," and immediately he got up.

Here we have the first 2 uses of that term, "Get up." Peter said "get up," so Aeneas "got up." He was put on his feet, restored to strength, invigorated and made whole. Peter's message to him was simple and straightforward: Jesus Christ heals you. Our Savior is enough to address any problem in the body, the mind, or the soul. There is no insufficiency in Him. He is the ultimate solution to any problem individually or globally. Whatever we face, we face with Christ as our fortress and refuge.

Now, Peter said that Jesus had healed this man and, because of that, Aeneas had an *immediate* job to do. “Arise and make your bed.” Some translate it as “get ready to eat.” Either works on a devotional level as we think about getting up and walking in the power of the Lord. As we do, we want to be sure to be nourishing our spiritual lives *and* we want to remember to be faithful to get our lives in order. That doesn’t mean everything we do has to be perfect all the time, but the Lord gives us power for living our regular lives. This idea comes out when the New Testament talks about qualifications for overseers in the church when it says, “they need to have their houses in order.” Make your bed. Love your wife. Love your husband. Don’t exasperate your kids. Christians shouldn’t be defined by personal lives that are full of chaos and inconsistency.

Acts 9:35 - ³⁵ So all who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

Lydda’s a city, Sharon is a region. This one interaction with the paralytic led to a huge response throughout the district. Tons of people were being converted. And this result can speak to us in a couple of different ways. First, it encourages us to go out and minister. As the story goes, if Peter had just stayed home, Aeneas doesn’t get healed and these people don’t turn to the Lord. Since he made himself available and purposefully went about the business of ministry, an amazing harvest took place. But the second encouragement is this: Trust the Lord to work out the increase. We see again and again in Acts that the Lord was “adding to the Church,” the church was increasing in numbers. But Peter didn’t have a strategy meeting and determine that Lydda was going to be the best place for a revival meeting. Sometimes, when Christians are talking or trying to make a plan, they’ll say something like, “What are we going to do to reach all of Hanford?” Not necessarily a bad desire, but look at what ‘reached’ the whole region in this text: Peter had *one* conversation with a guy. And, because of the amazing power of the Spirit, countless lives were impacted. You can’t plan that. You can’t schedule that. What we *can* do is be available and show up to work.

Acts 9:36 - ³⁶ In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. She was always doing good works and acts of charity.

This coast city, west of Lydda, was home to a remarkable Christian lady named Tabitha. No, she wasn’t an apostle or an evangelist or a church planter. But in a moment we’ll see that she made a big difference in the lives of a lot of people. Her ministry was different than that of Stephens, she didn’t debate. Different than Barnabas. She didn’t sell property. Different than Peter. She wasn’t in charge of a congregation. Her gifts were in compassion, generosity and service. And her acts of tangible kindness were essential. Very different than what Paul was doing at the time, but still the same Holy Spirit working in and through her.

This illustrates why we need to resist the urge to get on the bandwagon that “every Christian needs to be doing X.” This happens on the large, cultural level and on the local level. “Every Christian needs to do *this* program or ministry.” That’s just not the way the Lord does things. It’s election week, so we can use politics as an example. If you read or listen to topical ministry stuff enough, you’ll eventually hear “every Christian needs to get involved in the political process.” I just heard that sentiment on a church webcast this week. But it’s just not true. God lifts up Peters and Pauls and Stephens and Barnabases and Tabithas. What every Christian *needs* to do is be led by God as they walk in the good works that have been set before *them* to do.

Tabitha wasn’t traveling city to city, but she was busy all the time in the ministry and it was meaningful and needful. And what an encouragement her example is. God can use any one of us

here. He can use our voices. He can use our sewing needles. Whether our work is in a kitchen or a legislative hall, God is big enough to use all those various means to do what He wants to do.

Acts 9:37 - ³⁷ In those days she became sick and died. After washing her, they placed her in a room upstairs.

Compared to Aeneas, Tabitha's suffering was much shorter, but much more severe. And the Lord was mindful of both. If you're suffering tonight, God knows and He cares and He wants to minister to you in that suffering. It may end in healing, it may not, but the Lord loves you know is with you.

After Tabitha died, they did what was normal in their culture, preparing her for burial.

Acts 9:38 - ³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples heard that Peter was there and sent two men to him who begged him, "Don't delay in coming with us."

It's possible that these two guys left for Lydda *before* Tabitha had died. But, either way, they felt compelled to reach out to Peter, I'm guessing with the hope that God would do the impossible. Now, when they arrived, they put a lot of pressure on Peter. They *beg* him. They say, "Don't hesitate! Don't wait!" I'm sure they meant well, they were desperate, but we want to be sure it's the Lord leading us, not *pressure* leading us. There's always something that needs doing. There's more spiritual work that needs doing just in Hanford than any of us has the time or the capacity to do. And, sometimes even well-meaning fellow Christians come and heap pressure on us to be a part of something or to meet some need, and we want to be ready to respond, but responding where the Lord sends us.

What if every soldier and sailor and marine had shown up to Normandy beach? Normandy was obviously essential, but there was a Pacific theater, too. Or a less extreme example: When people run marathons, the race organizers set up hydration stations usually about every 2 miles. So, somewhere between 8 and 12 stops. What if all the volunteers go to the first station? All the water's there. All the helpers are there. You're gonna have a problem down on mile 22. So, be patient when people pile on the pressure. Figure out what the Lord wants you to do.

With that said, *never* in Acts do we see the Holy Spirit saying to some Christian, "I have *NOTHING* for you to do!" We want to be careful we're not become slactivist Christians. As the story shakes out, it's clear the Holy Spirit wanted Peter in Joppa, so he's given the all-clear to go. And, while he's been doing what ministry he could, now he's suddenly in the midst of one of those great, spontaneous, Divine appointments. And Peter is flexible enough to be used.

Acts 9:39a - ³⁹ So Peter got up and went with them.

He got up. Same term that was used of the paralytic. The Lord's desire is to continually lift us up and renew us and invigorate us for service. He continually invites us to act according to His will and in His power. So, even if you've been a believer for many decades, stay awake, keep following, be about the business of Christianity.

Acts 9:39b - When he arrived, they led him to the room upstairs. And all the widows approached him, weeping and showing him the robes and clothes that Dorcas had made while she was with them.

Peter had made no promises, he didn't claim he'd heal her or raise her, but he said, "I'll go with you and we'll be together." He responded to this need, even though it doesn't seem like he knew what his part was going to be to play. He's a great example of faith and flexibility in this section.

Acts 9:40 - ⁴⁰ Then Peter sent them all out of the room. He knelt down, prayed, and turning toward the body said, "Tabitha, get up!" She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up.

It seems like Peter wasn't exactly sure what was going to happen at first. Elsewhere in the book he's quicker to move. Think of the two paralytics he's healed. Walks up, has some assurance from the Lord so he immediately says, "Get up!" But here, it seems he's not as clear. He sends the people out. He spends some time in prayer. We notice that he mimics what he saw His Lord do in the similar situation. Not that the Lord was unsure, but since Peter wasn't immediately aware of God's plan to bring Tabitha back from the dead, he proceeded as Jesus would proceed. Always a good plan.

We talk about sermons in the Bible that we wish were recorded like Philip's sermon to the Ethiopian Eunuch or Jesus' sermon on the Road to Emmaus. I wish this *prayer* was recorded. But, at some point, the Lord revealed to Peter what was going to happen and Peter responded in faith.

Once again, Luke uses that term "Get up!" Come alive again. Be restored. And she does. I wonder if she was briefed in heaven before this happened. I imagine she must have been. Her example reminds us of how real and how simple resurrection is for us because of Jesus Christ. Because Christ died and rose again, we will leave death behind. Those believing loved ones you have lost you, will see again because they've left death behind. And so will you one day, if you're in Christ. And we'll be reunited in perfect strength and everlasting life.

On a devotional level, if you're a Christian who feels spiritually dead or spiritually asleep, be like Tabitha. Wake up. Get up. Leave that death behind. God gives you the power to do it. Respond as she did. Believe that it is Jesus Christ who heals you and be renewed in your life with Him.

Acts 9:41a - ⁴¹ He gave her his hand and helped her stand up.

Stand up is that term *yet again*. Here we see Peter *assisting* this sister. We want to be helpers. This is a great failing of the turn or burn street preachers. You may be pronouncing something that is 'true,' but you're not doing with love and you're not *helping* people stand up. God sends His Church to help one another stand. 1 Thessalonians: "Help the weak." Isaiah 35: "Strengthen the weak hands, steady the shaking knees." Romans 15: "help others do what is right and build them up in the Lord." Behave like Peter does here.

Acts 9:41b - Then he called the saints and widows and presented her alive.

What a great moment this would've been. Peter not only restores her to life, he restores her to *ministry*. "Here are your widows, Tabitha!" This scene reminds us that God puts us in a community of believers and knits our lives together. Be a *living* part of your local body. Present yourself for service to the Lord and to your brothers and sisters.

Acts 9:42-43 - ⁴² This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. ⁴³ And Peter stayed on many days in Joppa with Simon, a leather tanner.

Notice the choice of words: When the paralytic was healed “all” believed and turned to the Lord. Not just in one city, but a whole region! Now, a woman dies and is brought back from the grave and “many” believe. It’s more proof that you can’t predict the work of the Spirit. We’ve got to be led. If we try to plan and strategize everything, we’re going to get it wrong. But the Lord does it all right. And what He does is lift us up, renew us, strengthen us, and then sets us on a course of action that we’re to stand and walk in. Acts shows that’s not just God’s plan for an Apostle or two, but for *all* of us. Along the way, we are able to minister to people, receive ministry, strengthen one another, make a difference in this world, using the gifts and opportunities God has given to us. Various people, various activities, one grand effort, overseen and directed by the God who loves to encourage, build up and add to His Church.