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Marks of an Effective Personal Ministry, Part 2
Scripture: Acts 9:36-43
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If you have your Bibles, turn to Acts chapter 9, and we'll take up where we left off last time. One of the things that I learned in seminary, not very well, but nevertheless they taught it was that you never preach part of a sermon. You always finish it so that it's in total; and I have never really thought too much about it, because so many times, I just trust the Spirit of God, and I get going on some particular thought; and, pretty soon, the time is gone. I just pick it up where we left it; and somebody came to me last week and said the Lord had used that sermon in their life, even though it wasn't very organized. And so I felt better about that, but I'm sorry for the lack of organization for you who, like me, need that. It's very comforting to be organized.

Now, this morning we want to pick up where we did leave off, and we were talking last time, as we're going through the Book of Acts, so exciting a study for all of us. I know my heart has been enriched. We've come to chapter 9, and we've just begun verse 32 to 43; and we have seen here a narrative, basically, of two miracles that Peter does in the power of Christ. One is the restoration of a man eight years sick with paralysis. The other is the raising of Dorcas from the dead. Both of these are accomplished by Peter in the energy of Christ.

Now, it's interesting that these two little incidents from the life of Peter introduce us to his personal ministry. We think of Peter up until this point as involved only on a rather public basis. We hear him preaching to great crowds and proclaiming the Gospel to the Sanhedrin, and we see him moving about in Samaria with John preaching in various cities, and his ministry rather takes on the characteristic of a public ministry. And here, for the first time, apart from dealing with sin in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, we see him in a very personal ministry; and I think this becomes very important for us, because there are principles that are indicated in this little account that can be translatable into our personal ministries. And so I've called this, rather than just looking at it historically, "The Marks of Effective Personal Ministry."

Now, though many times a failure before Pentecost, Peter, after the Spirit of God empowered him, was a great success. He was a great success as God measures success. He had a dynamic character that was released in every sense of the word by the energy of the Spirit once he was really committed and filled by the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. He became the leader of the Twelve. He became the powerful preacher to the multitudes. He became the fearless apostle to the Sanhedrin.

He was the teacher of the early church. He went everywhere preaching, teaching, working miracles. He was really the opener of the Gospel, both to the Samaritans and to the Gentiles. He it was who had the keys to the Kingdom, Matthew 16. He also was the point of contact for the coming of the Spirit. Whenever the Spirit of God came on the next dimension of the church, Peter was always there as the point of contact.

In chapters 1 through 12 of the Book of Acts, he dominates the action, and then reappears again in chapter 15 at the council of Jerusalem. But, really, twelve of these chapters under the title "The Acts of the Apostles" could be called the acts of Peter, chapters 13 to 28, the acts of Paul. And so we've been looking at Peter; and, as we look at his ministry post-Pentecost, we learn a lot of really positive things about our own ministries and how to make them effective. I think oftentimes in...in giving out principles for ministry, we tend to go to Paul; and we tend to look at Paul as the one who gaves all...who gives all the illustrations of Christian life and Christian ministry. But... but I really think Peter has tremendous...a tremendous amount to offer us in principlizing effectiveness in the Christian life; and we see it just rather than Paul's theological approach to it, we see it in Peter's actions.

And, you know, in terms of learning principles, we not only need theorizing, we need action. We learn best principles that are activated in somebody's life, right? When somebody says to me, "This is a principle. I've never tried it, but I think it'll work," then I consider that. When somebody says, "This is a principle. I tried it, and it works," then I pursue that. And Peter shows us principles rather than telling them to us.

For example, I wanna know how to preach. Many of us wanna know how to preach. I don't think there's a better lesson on preaching than Acts chapter 2 and 3 when you just listen to Peter's sermons; because, as you listen to Peter preaching, you find, in all of his sermons, the characteristics of effective preaching. A passion, a concern, a power, a dynamic, a freedom to say what he thinks no matter what's gonna happen. You find an organization. He begins with a dynamic gripping, attention-getting introduction. Then he moves fast into a theme, and the theme is always Christ, and it's always supported by Scripture. Then he comes to a response. It's always very direct and always very positive, and so you learn how to preach if you listen to Peter.

And then you go to chapter 4, and you know something you learn there? You learn how to handle persecution, because Peter exhibits principles for handling persecution. Peter shows us that when you get persecuted, you're...you should be submissive to it. You should be filled with the Spirit. You should boldly use it as an opportunity to preach Christ. You should be obedient to God at all costs. You should bind yourself closer together with other believers for strength that you're gonna need at that time; and, lastly, you should pray that God would give you greater boldness. That's how to handle persecution, and Peter never said that. He just gave us that by illustration of his own life.

Then you come to chapter 5, and you know what Peter teaches us? He teaches us how to handle sinning Christians, because he runs into Ananias and Sapphira, and he handles them right. He confronts them with their sin, boldly confronting them and saying what it is in face of the whole church community; and we learn from Peter how to be bold in the face of sinning Christians. That's a principle we need to know. And so we see Peter in many, many ways in an example fashion teaching us principles; and I believe, really, Bible study and preaching and teaching is simply principlizing the Scripture. It's not enough to just tell you what it says. It's gotta be principlized so you can live it. So that's what we wanna do.

Now, as we come to chapter 9, Peter's got some more principles to teach us, and they're not stated again. They just are apparent in what he does. He is the great teacher by example, and here he teaches us the marks of effective personal ministry. Now, he wasn't always preaching to crowds. He got involved with people. He got involved on one-on-one basis, and this is exciting, and this is a thing that all of us, even particularly me need to be constantly aware of. That it's not enough to be involved only with crowds. There must be personal involvement, personal ministry; and Peter had that; and here we see two just simple little vignettes from the life of Peter that indicate some of the things that made him effective in personal ministry.

Now, last time, I told you there were six things that hit me out of this text that are the marks of effective personal ministry. I'll repeat them, and then we'll go into them. He was involved. That No. 1. No. 2, he was Christ-exalting. No. 3, he was available. No. 1, he was prayerful. No. 5, he was fruitful. No. 6, he was free from prejudice. Now, these are the things that I think really made Peter's effect...ministry effective here as we see it in Acts chapter 9; and I say again, these are transferable principles. These are things which can be learned by us and translated into our lives that we might have effective multiplication-type ministries. God wants us to work one-on-one with others, and here are the principles.

No. 1, and we're reviewing the first two. We only got past the first two last time. No. 1, he was involved, and we went into some detail about the ministry of Peter. How that Peter was going somewhere all the time. Peter never was able to stand anywhere very long. He was always going. In fact, one occasion when Jesus told him after His resurrection to go up in the mountains in Galilee and wait for Him, Peter stayed up there about as long as he could stand it, and finally said, "I can't take this any longer. I'm getting outta here. I'm going fishing." Took off and went back to fishing, because he couldn't stand to sit still. He was an active person by nature.

Well, when the Spirit of God got ahold of him, he was Holy Spirit activated in perfect conjunction with his temperament; and so he was everywhere doing everything; and I love the way verse 32 opens up, "And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters." There is a classic definition of Peter's pattern of life. He went everywhere, but you know something? It is the people that are going, it is the people that are active, it is the people that are involved that God directs easiest to His ministries.

You've watched as big diesel trucks with double trailers have pulled up to a stop sign; and if you notice carefully, if it's at all possible, they'll never stop. They'll always keep rolling, even though it's very, very slow; because they know it's much easier to handle that thing as long as it's moving.

God knows the same thing, and God always chooses those who are already active in the mainstream of ministries for His choicest tasks, believe me. And we compared that with Genesis 24:27, remember, where the...the servant went out to find a wife for Isaac, and he didn't even know what he was looking for. Find some nice girl for Isaac, see; and he got out there. The Lord led him right to the place, and he...he commented on it by saying this, Genesis 24:27, "I, being in the way...what?...the Lord led me." Because he was active, because he was moving, he was available, and God put him where He wanted him.

God uses His choicest, most active servants for His choicest tasks. Isn't it amazing how that some Christians never seem to get on...in on anything, and others are doing everything? You get in the mainstream, and God'll lead you to where He wants you. That's the first point. We went into that in great length last time.

All right, so he passed all through the quarters, and he came down to the saints who dwelt at Lydda. Down from Jerusalem, down the mountain, toward the sea coast, about 45 or 50 miles, little town called Lydda, right on the pathway to Joppa. "And he found a certain man...verse 33...named Aeneas, who had kept his bed eight years, was sick of the palsy." Here is a guy who'd been for eight years in bed with some kind of a paralysis.

Now here was Peter's involvement. Because he was involved, God led him to this place; and when he got there, because he was available, God used him to raise this man. As a result, verse 35 says, "All that dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him, and turned to the Lord." You see, here as a tremendous ministry just waiting right there in Lydda, but it needed a man who was on the move for God to be brought into the picture to accomplish what God wanted. So involvement was first.

The second thing about Peter that we saw last week that made him effective in personal ministry was he was Christ-exalting. He was preoccupied to the exaltation of Christ. When he arrived in Lydda, verse 33, he met...or at least he found this man Aeneas, and Peter said to him, verse 34, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee well." Now, notice there, he has...that is in effect a disclaimer on himself. He is saying, "I offer you nothing." He did the same thing, remember, at the gate, Beautiful, when he said, "Silver and gold have I none. Such as I have I give thee in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Rise up and walk." And so he really makes a disclaimer repeatedly on his own ability and his own power. He says, "Jesus Christ makes you well." Peter had only one desire, and that was to exalt Jesus Christ. He had no desire for his own exaltation.

Later on, in chapter 10, Cornelius fell on him...fell down at his feet. I...and I want you to get this, 'cause I wanna make a comment on it. Verse 25, "As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet." He was gonna go right down and just, as it were, kiss the feet of Peter, "And he worshipped him...and I like this...Peter took him up." Peter reached down and grabbed him and said, "Get up, Cornelius. What are you doing down there? I myself also am a man." Peter absolutely rejected any worship.

Now, one of the interesting things, I think, that we saw on our trip to the city of Rome and then on to Israel, was St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, Vatican City. I'll never forget going in that masterpiece of Michelangelo, which absolutely just beggars description. Takes your breath away even to behold the thing. And we walked in there, and I...one thing caught my eye, and I walked up to it, and it was a...a black statue of Peter about twice life size sitting on a...a little kind of a chair, a throne, really, and on about a four-and-a-half or five-foot pedestal. I noticed as I looked at the statue that his right foot was protruding, but the toe was removed. There was no toe, really, and just a shiny kind of a stub. Then I proceeded to watch, and I watched a series of people who came up and kissed that toe. A line of people just coming up kissing the toe of Peter, and I...I had two reactions. My first reaction was the same reaction that I had when I was in St. Mary's Church, and I watched people climbing up stairs on their knees, promised that they would get one year off of purgatory for every stair they went up; and my first reaction was sorrow. Sorrow over the tragic fact that they can't accept the word that Jesus said on the cross when He said, "Tay tellusty, it is finished." And that they think that they must earn some salvation and that these people are trapped into worshiping these, which really are idols, graven images. Sorrow was my first reaction.

My second reaction was I thought about Peter. I thought, "This must sicken the heart of Peter." This is just exactly what he got irritated about with Cornelius. He grabbed him, and he yanked him up, and said, "Get up." He knows...my mind thinks about that, you know, you could almost visualize that statue coming to life and saying, "Stop doing that." Because the one thing that Peter would've hated above everything would be for a whole religion to revolve around people worshipping him. He doesn't want that. He doesn't want that at all. All Peter ever wanted was to lift up Jesus. That's all he ever wanted. When he was gonna be crucified, he demanded that he be crucified upside down, because he didn't wanna be crucified like his Lord was...so he said, "Jesus makes you well."

Verse 35, "And all that dwelt at Lydda and Sharon saw him." He rose up immediately, the guy did, and he was well, and they "turned to the Lord." You know what happens if you lift up the Lord? People do what? Turn to the Lord. You know what happens if you lift up Peter? People turn to Peter. He was Christ-exalting. That's a mark of a personal ministry. Don't ever exalt yourself. Don't ever credit yourself with the victories. Don't ever lift up yourself in conversation, in your wisdom, in your ability to teach the Bible, and your ability to handle their problems, and yours and yours and...always...always, always exalt Christ. Preoccupation with that.

All right, third thing, and now we come to our message for today, and that is he was available, and this is a great thing. He was available. You know, the only ability that we have to offer God is availability, right? I...if I...I don't have any energy, I don't have any power on my own. All I can say is, "God, I'm available," and then anything He does through me is great. Now, if I am not available, then I am not the one thing, which is the only thing I can be. Think about it. So many Christians say, "Well, I'd sure like to be able to do that, but I just...my schedule doesn't permit." My friend, if you're not available, then you're not the one thing you can be. You can't be anything else. The only ability God wants outta you is availability so that He can then work through you with your several talents and gifts; but if you're not available, you're not anything.

Isn't it amazing how our priorities get so fouled up that we're everything but available to God? Now listen to verse 36, "Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha (which by interpretation is called Dorcas). This woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did." Now Peter's down here in this little place called Lydda. It's, oh, ten miles at the most southeast, going in a little bit from Joppa; and he's there; and now, meanwhile, up in Joppa there's this lady named Dorcas. Now this is to introduce to us a miracle. Now this miracle hinges on the power of God, but on the availability of Peter. God worked these miracles through His apostles, and Peter was the apostle in proximity to Joppa, and so God was going to work this through him. These men had power. We know that in 2 Corinthians 12:12, it says, "They had the signs of an apostle. They could do wonders and mighty deeds." And so he had to be available to God. And so here came a need from Joppa. Now, this seaport city of Joppa is today called Jaffa. It's really a...a coastal suburb of Tel Aviv; and, from our hotel room when we were there, we could see that the rocky shoreline that was Joppa; and that's...that's exactly where this situation was going on.

Now, this woman was a wonderful, wonderful woman. It says she was full of good works. Now, the word full is a study in itself in the Bible, because it has such richness of meaning. We are to be full of the Holy Spirit, full of all the fullness of God, for example, in Ephesians chapter 3 verse 19. So the concept of fullness means totally devoted to, totally controlled by. This woman was totally devoted to good works. She lived to give to others, and it further states almsdeeds, which were acts of charity, gifts of charity. Specifically, she made clothes for them. The word in the Greek is eliamosunai, from which we get eleemosynary, which means nonprofit organization. She was the one who did things for the poor and did things for the needy. She was, in effect, a woman who was the personification of what a Christian should be, and the word disciple is given to her, and it's interesting. It's the only feminine form of disciple in the New Testament, and she was such a marvelous woman that she really gets that honor. In the purest sense, she is everything a disciple is to be, because she...she was really fulfilling what she was called to be.

Remember Ephesians 2:10, "For you are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God had before ordained...what?...that you should walk into them." You're saved for good

works. I love what Paul says in Philippians 1:9. He says...to the Philippians, "This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in wis...in judgment, that you may approve things that are excellent, that you may be sincere without offense till the Day of Christ, being filled...there's that fullness again...with the fruits of righteousness." Totally controlled and dominated by good things, righteousness.

Colossians 1:10, I think, same thing. "You might walk worthy of the Lord, into all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work." See, that's what we're called to do. She's the personification of what a Christian is designed to be. Her life was a spiritual example to everybody, and this is the introduction that we have to this woman. If we knew nothing else about her, we knew enough to know what a wonderful person she was. In fact, she fits perfectly the pattern of a virtuous woman.

Remember Proverbs 31? Ladies, you oughta really know Proverbs 31. You oughta read it. You oughta memorize it. It tells you about a virtuous woman. One thing about a virtuous woman in verse 20 of that chapter says, "She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy."

All right, so we introduce ourselves to Dorcas. Watch verse 37. "And it came to pass in those days that she was sick and died." Now that's kinda sad for the church. She died. Now, the custom of the Jews at death was immediately to bury the body, since they did not do any embalming. They would merely do what they called the washing, the Mishnah prescribed a certain washing, and then the burial immediately. But in this case, they didn't bury her, which was very unusual, because dead bodies were a very unsacred thing in Israel to a Jew, and they didn't let dead bodies hang around. Verse 37 says, "Whom, when they had washed...or given preparation...they laid in an upper chamber." They just put her up on the second floor of the house. They didn't bury her.

Now, you say, "Why?" Verse 38. "And forasmuch as Lydda was near to Joppa and the disciples had heard that Peter was there." Aha! They know Peter's nearby, and they also know Peter has the power to raise the dead if the design of God is that; and so rather than burying her with great faith, they take her body and they stick it upstairs in the upper chamber. And then it says at the end of verse 38, "They sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them." The Greek is really stronger than that. "They entreated him, "Delay not to come to us. Peter, come."

And you know what verse 39 says? "Then Peter arose and...what?...went." You know, that is amazing to me. That is...you know, this guy's a busy guy. I mean he is going around, and he's got all kinds of things going. And really, folks, when you think about it, I think we think of our lives as busy, but these people were really busy. They were the heartbeat of the very life of the church. I mean they had him, I'm sure, teaching from morning till night. They had him out witnessing. They were bringing in all their neighbors that weren't saved yet and saying, "Come, I want you to talk to Peter," and they were dragging Peter from house to house. They had meetings set up and so forth, so on. He was an

active guy.

And, I mean, you know, if a guy would come in and say, "Look, Caesar wants you to come and preach to the Roman Guard," oh, man, I'm leaving. I'll do that. Or "Listen, there's a group of...of big dignitaries of the Jews of Jerusalem that want you to come and present Christ to them." Or "Listen, there's a big opportunity up here," and he said, "Look." They ran to him and they said, "Look, Peter, there's a bunch of widows up there that are all broken up, 'cause Dorcas died. A bunch of little old ladies, and we just need ya."

Well, I mean that isn't really very dramatic; and let's face it. I mean he didn't go raise Dorcas for her benefit. I mean you...I don't know where she was for those. There's speculation about whether she was really in heaven, but you can imagine, you know, God coming to her and saying, "Look, Dorcas, I know you've been here a couple hours, but you're gonna have to go back." But it wasn't for her benefit, and it certainly wasn't necessary for the widows, because there were some lessons in learning how to pick up the slack when somebody else passed on and fill in the gap, plus God already has started Dorcas' circles. He coulda just as soon started it then. Somebody else coulda got a few sewing machines and taken care of what she was doing.

So really it's a strange thing, and Peter doesn't say, "Well, look, I mean she died. Praise the Lord. She's with the Lord. You widows just pick up the slack and get together and...and, you know, take...you tell those widows that I'll pray for them." No, that sounds familiar. I even say that sometimes. But, you see, Peter didn't do that. He just got up and went. He dropped everything. You know, it's a wonderful thing about being so involved with people that they know you're committed to 'em and so uninvolved that God knows He can move ya whenever He's ready to. You got that one?

I believe in being involved, but I believe when God says, "Go," that's the time to go. I think of Paul in Ephesus. He was so involved. He was teaching there 12 hours a day for three years. Just imagine that, and he was crying a lot of the time. He says, "I teach not to warn you night and day with tears." Finally, when he got all done with teaching 'em for all those three years, he just finally took a big sign and said, "Oooooh, I've not failed to declare unto you the whole council of God. Now you take over." I mean I'll bet he was tired. He was ready to go. God said, "You're done." He wasn't so involved in Ephesus, even after three years. Didn't have to worry about a thing. Just pick up and go.

You know what happens? When Christians get into trouble is when they get socked into the world. Remember Lot? Instead of staying loose like Abraham, he got locked in, pitched his tent towards Sodom and, whoo, bad news. We need to be involved with the people to whom God has us and ready to go when He calls us. Have you heard His voice calling you and leading you into a ministry that you couldn't do because you're locked into something? Get rid of that something. People say, "Oh, I'd...I'd like to come to that. I can't do it. _____ understand my work and my thing." Then change it if God calls. Understand your priorities.

All right, verse 38 simply says that they desired him. Verse 39 simply says, "And he went." Now, you say, "Well, he was probably urged by the Holy Spirit." Sure, he was; but he was also sensitive to needs. He was available. There's such a blessedness in just being available.

A fellow came to my office, oh, it's been three weeks ago; and he said, "I need somebody to share with me and teach me the Word." About...I spent about...four months ago, I...three or four months ago, I prayed the Lord would send me some men that I could just disciple on a one-to-one basis; and since then, I...I...I've had about five, and so I'm changing my prayers a little bit this time. But, anyway, Lord, you know, that's...that's good right there.

But this fellow came, and he said, "You know, I...I really need some help _____." He said, "But I don't...I don't imagine that with your busy schedule you'd have time." And the Lord really convicted my heart, and so I just said...well, I felt really _____ the Spirit, yet I had to...to release my will to the Spirit, and I said, "_____ great, we'll meet." And so we've been meeting together, and this...this God has given me ministries like this, and this is a question of availability, of just believing that the Spirit's in it, and so I'm available. And maybe it means I can't do something else a little more glamorous or a little more, what should I say? Satisfying to the ego, but it's of the Spirit, and so we do it.

So Peter was available, and that's a fantastic thing. And, as I said earlier, you only have one thing to offer God, availability, and if you don't give Him that, you've got nothing to offer. So don't cut that part out, will ya? He responded so readily. He went. Beautiful thought.

Well, when he got there, it's interesting what happened. "When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber; and all the widows...this is kinda humorous really...all the widows stood by weeping and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made while she was with them." You know what their moaning about? They're moaning about their wardrobes. "Ohhhhh, what am I gonna do for next winter? I'm not gonna have anything to wear. Look what Dorcas made me. Oh, dear." And they loved her because she made 'em all goodies. They loved her. Sure, they did. She made the coats. Greek word means inner garments. Garments. Outer garments. So she was making them all these things...giving her life, spending her life on 'em, and they loved her. They really loved her. They loved her for her love, and they loved her for her gifts to them, and they were moaning because who was gonna care for them, and, oh, they loved her and they missed her in her...in her absence of death. It was a sad thing.

Well, they were moaning and groaning and crying, and, you know, a lotta ladies doing that be kind of a messy deal. And so lots of tears and lots of sniffling and all that. And Peter got in there, you know, a big, old burley character like that. First thing he did in verse 40 was send 'em all out. He said, "All right, all you ladies now, you just get outta here and let me alone." So he did that. Just...just a

footnote here. You know, the...the ministry of women in a church is so marvelous. There is such a high calling for women. You know, God has really given us, in the church, in this church, some marvelous women who have been used of God in mighty ways and are being used of God now. Even as I think right now, as I talk to you, there are probably 50...50 or more ladies out teaching your children and teaching other ladies the truths of the Scriptures. God has given women a marvelous ministry. There are deaconesses who go out and minister, visit shut-ins and sick people and work with women who have needs and spiritual problems. And so women have a marvelous ministry in the church. In fact, really, there's a...and...and in addition to that, the ministry that widows can have is especially wonderful if you read in 1 Timothy chapter 5, you read about the wonderful potential of ministry for widows. How that in the early church Paul says, "You oughta have a list of the widows that are able to minister in the church, and you oughta give them spiritual responsibility."

Why? Because of their years of knowing Christ, because of the years of maturity, because of their commitment to Jesus. They...they can be used, and he goes on to say, "They oughta be the kind of widows who have entertained strangers. They've got open homes. The kind who've washed the saints' feet. They're humble. You know, the kind who are characterized by good works and personal holiness." He goes on. He gives all...he says, "When you get those widows, get 'em together. Get a list, and use those widows in the church." Tremendous ministry for them, spiritual ministry. Now he says, "You watch out for the young widows, 'cause the young widows will make a commitment to Christ. Then they'll see a nice looking guy go by, and their commitment to Christ will waiver a little bit, see? They'll say, 'I'll give the rest of my life to Christ, and then, Mmmmmm, see,' and they drift a little bit when they see nice looking guys."

So Paul says, "Look, you young widows, don't get on the list. Get married. Have children." See, but those older, mature widows, God says, "Use them." There's a tremendous ministry for women. The ministry of the deaconess is outlined so beautifully in...in Paul's letter to Timothy, how they can be used to serve. You know, Paul mentions with favor many women in the New Testament: Phebe, Priscilla, Mary, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Persis, Julia, and he goes on to talk about the sister of Nereus. He talks about Lois and Eunice, and then he talks about, to the Philippians, Euodia and Syntyche. You know, he had a high regard for women. He said, "They labored with me in the Gospel." He... he...he really used women in so many ways. Now he did add, of course, in Philippians, "Help those women," recognizing the fact that women functioned best under the...under the help of men. You...that's true, isn't it? That's what the Bible says.

Philippians 4, it says that. It says, "Syntyche, you help those women." You know, God has designed a place for women that is equal to men. Galatians 3:28, there's neither male nor female in the body of Christ. We're all one, but in God's marvelous design from the very beginning, He has designed that men be in authority, that women be in submission. This is just the design of God, and it's beautiful, and it's not wrong. It's right. It's right, and you know something? It was because Eve didn't do that that the whole mess came about. You see, Eve could've been submissive to a sinless husband. She

chose to go her own way, and every woman has wound up having to be submissive to a sinful husband.

You see, God designed a beautiful plan. Woman on her own volition violated it and was sentenced then, not only to the pain of childbearing, but to be subject to a sinner. Now don't push that too far, ladies. We're sinners saved by grace, but there are some things that a woman cannot do, and I say that in the sense of Biblical prohibition, and that is indicated to us in 1 Corinthians chapter 14, just a footnote here. This doesn't count in the sermon, so don't time this. But 1 Corinthians 14:30...34 says, "Let your women keep silence in the churches for it is not permitted unto them to speak, but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law, and if they will learn anything, let 'em ask their husbands at home, for it's a shame for women to speak in the church."

Now, here he's talking about the church as it comes together in its worship. A woman is not to be the teacher. A woman is not to be the preacher. People say to me, "What do you think of women preachers?" I don't have to say what I think of women preachers. The Bible says simply that. Now, in addition to that, there's another thing that we oughta note, and that's 1 Timothy 2 verse 9, and this is good. "In like manner also that women adorn themselves in modest apparel." Now, here's some things that women can do. Modest apparel, very important, a sense of shame is implied in the word modest in the Greek, "With godly fear and sobriety, not with braided hair with gold and pearls and so forth." What they used to do is put all these strings of pearls, and the more stuff you had in your hair, the richer you were. So he says, "Simple hair." Then he goes on, and he says, "And not costly array. Don't buy expensive clothes." Pretty simple stuff, not too hard to figure out. Then verse 11, "Let the women learn in silence with all subjection. I permit not a woman to teach nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."

That, to me, that is a disqualification period for women preachers. Now, you say, "Why did he say that?" Verse 13, "For Adam was first formed, then Eve." God from the very beginning designed that man would be in the lead. Second thing, "And Adam wasn't deceived, but the woman, and being deceived, hers was the initial transgression." Therefore, it's not only the fact of creation that subjects a woman. It's the fact of her willing sinfulness to begin with. Then I love 15, "Not withstanding," Paul says, "Lemme _____ she shall be saved in childbearing." You wanna know something? You know who really rules the world? Woman. Why? They're the ones that raise all of us. Ladies, don't ever discount your power. You've got 16 years, at least, with that life, and in great measure, you will mold it. My dad always used to say, "If you've got a good mom, any old stick'll do for a dad." See.

The right woman...the right woman really moves the world. You...your salvation, your deliverance from this kind of subjection comes in the fact that all the men that are born into this world are born to women, and women can have the marvelous responsibility of raising them and the nurture and the admonition of the Lord. You can make the effect that you want on the world by raising your children. All these women that are running around screaming blue murder about women's lib are neglecting the

one thing that they could do to change the world, and that's go home and take care of their children.

Now, we come to this very principle right here, as we see in the Book of Acts, a ministry going on to women and with women. These widows, they were being ministered to by another woman. You know, the church has a responsibility, according to 1 Timothy chapter 5, to care for the widows. If you're a Christian, and you have a widowed mother in your family, you're to care for her. The church is not to care for her; but if she has no family to care for her, the church should care for her. That's the design of God, and the church should not only care for her, but make her available for ministry. God expects women to be fruitful ministering for Him.

All right, so here we see that these women were active. Here was a wonderful group of ministering women, Dorcas being the one in the lead, and these other women being ministered unto; and Peter arrives; and he puts them all forth; but just to pull this though out of here. He was available. I always think of what Isaiah said, "Who shall I send, and who will go for Me," and Isaiah answered, "Here am I...what?...send me." Isn't that good? You see a need and say, "God, there's a need over there. Why don't You send me?" That's availability. Peter picked up everything and went. And, you know, it's amazing to realize that when he got there he stayed a couple years, and we'll get to that in a minute. He actually stayed. He was so loose from Lydda and from anywhere else that he could go over for a few days in Joppa and stay a couple of years, and it never bothered him. That's how...that's how able he was to move in the mind of the Spirit.

All right, so Peter was involved, Christ-exalting, and available. Now, let's get to the fourth one. He was prayerful, and this we'll just mention, because it's a very obvious point. Verse 40, "But Peter put them all forth and kneeled down and prayed, and turning to the body, said, 'Tabitha, arise,'" In the Greek, "Tabitha, koomee," and it reminds you of what Jesus said to the child of Jairus. Remember He put 'em all out. Then He said, "Toleetha koomee, My daughter, arise." Here Peter says, "Tabitha, koomee." _____ "And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up."

Now, that's a miracle, friends. She's been dead minimum 36 to 48 hours. She'd been dead, and when Peter said, "Arise," everything in her body was reversed like running the film backwards. All the rot and the decay that had begun to set in was reversed, and she came outta there as fresh, clean, and whole as...as new. It's a miracle. God performed a miracle, and the miracle came about because Peter was available, and because he was prayerful. He acknowledged where the source of power was. Look at it in verse 40. He put 'em all out, and he kneeled down and did what? Prayed. Aren't you glad it doesn't say he kneeled down and said, "Tabitha, arise"? Because it gives us this little thought again that we need to focus on that our power is God, not ourselves.

You know, it would've been easy for a guy like Peter to by this time think he really had some kinda power. I mean he had really pulled off some unbelievable things. He'd been going around healing people to the point where it was getting to be sort of a commonplace activity. Back in chapter 5, I

think it is, yes, verse 16, "There came a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem bringing sick folks and them who were vexed...listen...with unclean spirits; and they were healed, every one."

Do you know that people even got to the point where they were trying to drag their people out into the shadow of Peter because he had such healing power? It would've been very easy at this point in Peter's life with so many successes to just go in and say, "Tabitha, arise," and count on his own strength. You know what would happen? Nothing woulda happened.

You know, it's a temptation, Christian, to have a little bit of success and then think you did it. You ever led somebody to Jesus Christ and found yourself saying, "Hey, I led somebody to Jesus Christ," see? Fighting that in your mind? I know. I preach...preach a sermon sometimes. Somebody coming and says, "It was a wonderful sermon." Bless their heart, and I go out and say, "You know, I...I guess that wasn't bad after all." You know? I...and you begin to think, "I did it." And so we say, "God save us from ourselves." All we have to offer Him is availability. Whatever's done, He did it.

Paul says, "I will not speak of those things which the Lord Jesus Christ has not wrought in me, because anything good in me He did, and I'm not about to talk about the bad stuff. That's all I've got that I've done." And so Peter says, in effect, "I acknowledge Your power, God. You do it." It's a fantastic thing. As long as you're resting in your own strength, you're impotent. As long as you rest in His, you're powerful.

In Ephesians chapter 3 verse 7 it says, I love this, Paul says, "Of which I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me...watch...by the effectual working of His power." Ephesians 3:20, "Now unto Him who's able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think, according to the power that works in us." It's His power. It's just our availability.

Five young men one time were in London years ago, and they were Christians, and they thought it would be interesting to go to Spurgeon's tabernacle and hear the great master preach. So they arrived a little early, hoping to get a seat, and the doors were still locked. They were standing on the steps in the front, and a gentleman walked up to them and introduced himself by this statement. He said, "Young men, would you like to see the heating apparatus of this church?" They look at each other and thought, "The heating apparatus, who wants to see that?" But they didn't want to turn away their friend that they had just met, and so they said, "Why, fine, if you would desire to show that to us, yes," being gracious young men. So he proceeded to take them in the door. They went down long steps, and they came to a hallway that looked like a dead end. They went to the end of the hallway, and a man opened the door, and there was this large room filled with 700 people on their knees in prayer. At which point, the gentleman turned to them and said, "There, my young men, is the heating apparatus of this church." They later found out that their unknown guide as Charles Haddon Spurgeon himself. You see, he recognized the power was not his, but the power was God's, and it

was unleashed in prayer. You know what prayer is? Prayer at this point is simply the admission that I can't do it, and God can. That's it, and that releases power. Jesus did it. He went to the cross. Before He got to Calvary, He went to Gethsemane. Well, Dorcas sat up. Boy, beloved, just to add a word of exhortation, pray. Make that a priority in your life. Pray for us; even as Paul said, "I say to you, pray for us."

Verse 41, "And he gave her his hand." He just reached over and just took Dorcas by the hand. "He lifted her up; and when he had called the saints in, he said, 'Now you can come in now,' and he presented her alive." Man, can you imagine the joy? Oh, the tears just washed away and joy musta...they musta jumped and had a marvelous time in that house. There was dear Dorcas...As I said earlier, it certainly wasn't for Dorcas' benefit. She must have considered it a joy from the standpoint of the joy of her friends, and they considered it a joy because their loved one was in their presence. That's always joy. But God had a whole different thing in mind. He didn't do it for Dorcas' benefit. He didn't do it for their benefit. He did it for another reason. Verse 42, "And it was known throughout all Joppa, and many...what?...believed in the Lord." Do you know why He did it? Just the same reason that all of the miracles had been done, as confirming signs to prove to the world that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was true. He did it as a sign.

God had evangelism in mind. Watch this. This is God's process of multiplication. Here old Peter dropped everything and went up to take care of a bunch of weeping widows, and revival broke out in the city. See? Don't ever think that you can determine how effective any ministry's gonna be. You believe God for it...You believe God for the littlest thing. God may have multiplication in mind that'll stagger your imagination...The power that is in the Gospel doesn't lie in the eloquence of the preacher. Doesn't...if it did, then men would be the converters of souls, said Spurgeon. It doesn't lie in the wisdom of men. Spurgeon said, "We might preach till our tongues rot, till we exhaust our lungs and die, and never a soul will be saved unless there is the power of God moving in. He's right.

Peter was prayerful and, thus, powerful; and, you know, Paul had the same attitude in 2 Corinthians chapter 12. Listen to this. He said, "My grace is sufficient for thee. My strength is made perfect in weakness...Paul says...More gladly then I will glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. I take pleasure infirmity, reproach, necessity, persecution, distress, for Christ's sake. For when I'm weak, then I am strong."

Do you know what? Unless you're really weak, you can't really be strong; and so God just sends stuff in our lives to keep on smashing us down and making us weep. You know, when everything's going real well, and everything's happy go lucky, you feel kinda, "Man, I could do anything," just...and then when you think you're strong, you're really weak. And so then when God sends all kinds of things into distress your heart and persecution comes and distress and trouble and trial, and you really know you're nothing, then you're in the place where you can be strong. Praise God for persecution...If you think you're strong, you're weak. If you know you're weak, you're on the verge of strength. So Paul

says, "I am strong when I recognize my weakness." That's what this prayer is. You realize you have nothing, and you turn to God, and His power is released in your behalf.

All right, verse No. 42 gives us the fifth point in the marking of Peter's personal ministry. He was fruitful. Just quickly. "And it was known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord." It's an interesting thing that the fruit here wasn't really directly Peter's, but indirectly. Right? He did the miracle through the power of God. The fruit came as an indirect result, but fruit comes. All believers are saved to be fruitful.

And John 15:8, Jesus said, "I want you to have not just fruit and not just more fruit, but much fruit, much fruit." Now, you know, you may not see it all in your own lifetime. Always think of William Carey in India who had 35 years of ministry there and saw a handful of people saved in 35 years. Spent those 35 years translating the Bible into all the dialects of India, and every missionary who's been there since has used the work that he did to present the Gospel. He's in heaven, but he's still bearing fruit right today, 1973. You see, some plant, some water, and what? God gives the increase. Christians are to be fruitful. They will be fruitful if they follow the patterns of the Word of God.

Now, what is fruit? When we say fruit of a Christian, what do we mean? Well, we mean Christ-likeness, Galatians 5:22 and Ephesians 5:9. Talk about Christ-likeness as fruit. Praise is fruit. Remember Hebrews 13:5? "The fruit of my lips praise." Giving to the needy is fruit, Romans 15:28. Blessing other people is fruit, 1 Corinthians 14:14. Holy living is fruit, Colossians 1:10. But most dominantly, and most significantly, converts are fruit - people that come to Christ. I believe the Christian is to bring others to Christ.

Remember what Paul said to the Romans? "I want to come to you hoping that I might have some fruit among you as I have among the Gentiles." And, there, fruit means people redeemed, people saved. First Corinthians 16:15 is the same thing exactly. Fruit is converts. So the effective servant of Jesus Christ will bear fruit. People will get saved from your ministry. You say, "Well, I've never led anybody to Christ. I don't speak to great groups." You may never really get into the place where you see multitudes coming to Christ, but what you're doing, if you're doing it faithfully in the energy of God, will multiply indirectly to the salvation of souls. You got that? Now, that's no excuse for not witnessing, but that's true anyway. Every Christian's life is to multiply, ultimately, to the saving of souls...

So Peter's ministry was fruitful, not because it was directly attached to the fruit, but because somewhere along the line...what he began to do, God continued. Believe me, people, if we love Jesus Christ, everything we touch in our ministry can issue in fruit. Trust God for the fruit. Be faithful at the point of your ministry. Sometimes just working with one individual may bear far more fruit than speaking to a mass of people about Christ. People always talk about the great evangelists in the world, and I always think about the person who led 'em to Christ...Oh, that's fruit for them.

Lastly, the final verse is a footnote, and I think a very important point. Peter had an effective personal ministry. Watch this one, because he was free from prejudice...Verse 43, "And it came to pass that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon, a tanner." You say, "What does that have to do with free from prejudice?" One of the most despicable trades in the mind of a Jew was that of a tanner, because a tanner, you see, dealt with the dead...the skin of dead animals, making leather. No self-respecting Jew would have anything to do with a tanner. He was despised; and, in fact, the Mishnah said if a woman had a husband who took on the trade of a tanner, she had the right to divorce him, because he went into something so defiled. A tanner was not respected. Not only that, it was ceremonially unclean.

And the beautiful thing is that here is Peter, who's a Jew, and he's been a Jew all along, and he's been trained and raised in all the prejudices and all the traditions, in all of the Old Testament attitudes; and, you know, his prejudices are dying hard. Man, these are rough days for Peter. The first thing he's gotta do is throw his arms around a bunch of Samaritans, and that was a tough one, because the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans; and he's begun to do that; and his heart has opened up; and he's accepted the Samaritans into the body. And in the next chapter, chapter 10, he's gonna have to accept the Gentiles. He's gonna have to throw his arms around Cornelius and call him brother, and it's...this is a tough time in his life. Not only that, chapter 10 is so terrific. We'll get to it in a couple weeks. He has a vision, and...and in this vision he sees this big sheep with all these animals, and...and the Lord says to him, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat." And Peter goes, "Ohhhhh, I can't do that. I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." God says, "That economy's over, Peter. Rise, Peter. Kill and eat." So dietary prohibitions, the Lord's beginning to knock down those walls, too.

So, you see, this whole thing that Peter's built up all his life is coming down. It wasn't any problem for the Lord to heal an eight-year paralytic. Wasn't any problem for the Lord to raise from the dead a couple of days old...a couple...couple days dead Dorcas. But, man alive, to reverse an old man who'd been raised in all these traditions, prejudices, and ceremonial ritualistic rules, that was a job.

And, in fact, he even had a relapse in Antioch. Some Jews came into town, and he forsook the Gentiles and started going back to Jewish customs, and Paul says, "I withstood him to the face, nose to nose, I told him what he was doing. I blasted him." Peter had a relapse. But here he's beginning to see his freedom. Here he is living with a tanner, see? Terrific.

Lemme tell you something, folks. I really believe the effective ministries that you and I are gonna have are gonna have to be based on a no-prejudice heart. You know I think what cripples Christianity around the world, and it comes under all different guises, is just prejudice. Just an inability to accept people for what they are, and it's so true in so many Christian circles that if you don't fit the mold, they're not interested in you. That's true. Believe me, it's true.

I can tell you from my own experience about a pastor in the South who endeavored to reach the black people in his community. The pressure came so hot and heavy from his church congregation. I think I shared this with you a couple years ago. From his church congregation, the pressure came so hot and heavy, he had a nervous breakdown. They took him to the hospital. I knew the man. I was in the city ministry myself. Took him to the hospital in downtown Jackson, Mississippi. The second day he was there, he dove out of a third-story window and killed himself on the pavement. Why? 'Cause he couldn't...he couldn't exist in the tearing apart of all this turmoil of prejudice. He was trying to overcome it, but the pressure coming from him, from other angles, tore him up on the inside. You can't minister effectively for Jesus Christ as long as you see somebody in a prejudicial sense. Any missionary on any field of the world will tell you that if a guy goes to the mission field and has any kind of a prejudice...prejudicial hang-up, he is ineffective. He is, worse than that, a detriment to the ministry.

One thing we've got to be able to do, beloved, is take people the way they are. Now, I'll give you a good example of a guy with prejudice. That was Jonah. Jonah went to Nineveh, and God used him anyway; and then when all the Gentiles received the...the truth from God and believed in God, Jonah went out and said, "Kill me, God, I can't...can't tolerate Gentile belief." Got under...got under a thing, and he just wanted to die. That's still going on today. You know, there's some people who just won't minister to certain people, 'cause they don't like their culture...

The Lord's gonna have to knock some walls down in a lotta lives, I think. You know, Paul had 'em all knocked down in his life. He said, "If I'm with the Jews, I can reach 'em as Jews. If I'm with those who are without the law, I reach 'em as without the law. I become all things to all men that by all means I might save some."

Oh, free from, you know, some people aren't free from prejudice. They're so hung-up, they're...they're tied up in knots...Now, I heard one pastor who said that...I heard of one pastor who said, "There'll never a long-hair in our church." That is a stupid statement. Is that to say that because somebody has long hair you can't minister to them? That's exactly what it's to say. That's not being free from prejudice...

I don't care what the prejudice is, any prejudice that finds its way into the heart of a Christian is something that God doesn't even have, because the Bible says God is no respecter of persons. Now, the only justification for your prejudice and mine would be, then, that we have a higher moral standard than God does...There's no place for this, and I think we need to learn this well. I think today is the day when we've got such a cross-culture in our world that sometime along the way we've gotta learn to accept men for what they are.

He lived with a tanner. It says, "It came to pass he tarried many days." The same phrase used earlier in the chapter to speak of Paul's three years in Arabia. He stuck around a couple years, and the whole time he lived in Simon's house, and he never turned him into a carpenter. He let him be what he was. He didn't make him change. Now, if he was a thief, he'd have made him change, 'cause that's a moral issue.

Let your prejudice die. This is a mark of mature believers. Picked up an article somebody gave me last week. It was an article in the...in some Labor Department publication about unisex bathroom facilities, which is, you know, strange to say the least. But, anyway, there's some guy presenting a bill to the Labor Department about having unisex bathroom facilities, and it went on and on. It was really a ridiculous thing. But, anyway, this article then was kind of capsized by this one pastor who quoted...who wrote this little thing at the bottom that said, "If you...all the people in the Labor Department are nothing but screwballs, kooks, and nuts." Then he went on to make really stupid statements. Well, you know, that isn't true.

I often thought to myself, "If somebody that needed Jesus Christ who happened to work for the Labor Department ever ran into that guy, Christianity would become so distasteful to him that he would have eliminated any possibility of communication." I'll never forget getting a letter one time from somebody who's pretty well-known, who was blasting everybody in the Peace Corps, because he didn't agree with the Peace Corps. What happens when you do that and somebody comes along? What happens when you have an opportunity to share with somebody in the Peace Corps who knows what you've been doing to the Peace Corps? That's foolishness.

My, we need to learn to love people and to accept them what they...for what they are. Jesus did...Now, He didn't like their sin, but He sure loved them. Prejudice needs to die if you're gonna have effective personal ministry. Break down the walls. Ask God to help you if you've got some prejudice.

All right, there are the marks of Peter's effective ministry. I think they're...they're salient. Good for us. Be involved. Be Christ-exalting. Be available. Be prayerful. Be fruitful...free from prejudice. I hope they'll be true in your life and in mine. Let's pray.

Father, we are thankful this morning that You have given us principles to live by, principles to minister by. We ask You especially this morning to tie these truths into our minds that we might see and understand how that we can be, as Peter was, effective in ministering in a personal way. We thank You for what You did in multiplying his personal ministry to real revival all over that part of the world. And, Father, we know that You can do the same with us. If we're faithful in the simple things of ministering our spiritual gifts to one another, of giving to the needy, of satisfying those who are in need of us, of being available, of just doing the simple things that...that really fulfill Your will for us, we know that You'll multiply those things in the great glory for Yourself. May it be so in our lives, Father, that we are yielded to that which is priority. We are concerned about being what we need to be, that

You might receive the glory. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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