



Session 10
Summer 2020
Multiage

Tabitha

ACTS 9:32–43

prepare

PRAYER

God, help me to be an example to these children of caring and kindness. Amen.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

To learn about God at work in the life of Tabitha

STORY SUMMARY

Peter traveled many places to visit Jesus' followers. In Lydda, he healed Aeneas, who had been paralyzed for eight years. Nearby in Joppa, Tabitha's friends sent for Peter. Tabitha (or Dorcas), a faithful disciple, had become ill and died. When Peter arrived, he found many grieving women surrounding Tabitha. Peter knelt and prayed, saying, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes and sat up. This became known throughout Joppa as many began following Jesus.



teaching tips for multiage

In today's story, Peter does acts of healing through God's power, but healing is not the main theme of the session. The emphasis is on the work of Tabitha—her kindness in sharing and using her hands to make things for others. If your church has a sewing group, bring an example of their work for Peace notes. Or maybe some in your congregation knit or crochet prayer shawls for people who are sick or need comfort. Or find symbols of other types of sharing.

Children this age love to work on projects. Think of ways to involve children in a caring project, such as collecting food for a local food pantry. Or help with another ongoing project of your church.

Decide which Explore activities you will do, and check Supplies and To do throughout the session to see what needs to be prepared.

This little gem of a story is sandwiched between longer dramas of leading apostles. It highlights two of Luke's favorite themes: economics and the essential roles of women. As we have seen previously, Luke parallels the apostles' actions in Acts with Jesus' actions described in the Gospel.¹ In today's text, Peter resuscitates a dead woman in the same way that Jesus raised a man in the town of Nain in Luke 7:11–17. Luke also uses a literary technique called a gender doublet. In other words, he talks about a man or men's work followed by a story about a woman or women's work. In this passage, the healing of Aeneas is paired with Tabitha's rising from death.²



A Spirit-inspired collective

Biblical commentators from Western individualist, capitalist societies assume that the Jerusalem church was only a “community of consumption,” and that they gave up the experiment when the money ran out. There is no evidence of that. Essene writings, along with artifacts discovered at their center at Qumran, demonstrate that the Essenes were organized into “communities of production” as well as consumption. These became the socioeconomic models for Jesus-communities as well.

So it makes more sense to picture Tabitha the craftswoman working in her shop while she employs unattached

women—called “widows”—to work with her. More likely they were a collective, selling the clothing they made to support their community. When Peter brings out the revived Tabitha, he calls together the “saints and widows.” These widows stand out as a defined group within the larger church, organized to help each other survive and thrive. But like the later example of Paul the tentmaker, such economic arrangements were also a powerful means of mission. You stop by to shop, to chat—and soon the talk is all about the risen Jesus!

In her book, *Women in the Acts of the Apostles*, Ivoni Richter Reimer stresses how the miracle of Tabitha's resurrection was dependent upon relationships. Without Tabitha surrounded by her coworkers, without the “saints” in Joppa, without ties to the Jerusalem church and Peter, there would have been no miraculous resurrection. Conversely, the miracle itself fuels town gossip, and “many believed in the Lord.”

The tailor we cannot live without

Verse 36 is the only place where Luke uses the word *disciple* with a feminine ending (*mathtria*). That may imply that Tabitha was one of the original women disciples who accompanied Jesus and is now part of the apostolic mission. She has a double name: Tabitha in Aramaic and Dorcas in Greek, both meaning “gazelle.” Does she stand as a graceful bridge between Hebrews and Hellenists, further healing the rift in the community mentioned in Acts 6?

All we know for certain is that this “gazelle” is a disciple, a skilled tailor “devoted to good works and acts of charity.” But here again, we should reconsider the conventional interpretation of Tabitha's actions. Her “good works” imply spiritual leadership that goes beyond poor relief. Her role is so critical to the church in Joppa that when she falls ill and dies, two men are sent to nearby Lydda to fetch Peter. They cannot afford to lose this woman.

There is another clue, not only to Tabitha's importance, but also to the economic structure of the church. The weeping widows who march Peter upstairs to Tabitha's bed show him clothing that she “had made while she was with them.” Tabitha had not sewed these clothes *for* the widows, but *with* the widows. She was not handing out garments to destitute widows, as is usually assumed.

1. In Acts 2, Peter announces the coming of the Spirit as Jesus did in Luke 4:18–19. The lame man's temple healing in Acts 3 reminds us of Jesus' synagogue healing of the bent-over woman in Luke 13:10–17.

2. Among numerous examples in Luke's Gospel, see 8:26–56 (male demoniac and two sick females); 10:25–42 (Good Samaritan and Martha and Mary); and 15:1–10 (lost sheep and lost coin).

gather

supplies

- *Shine Songbook and CD* (or digital versions)
- *Annual Shine Songbooks*
- CD player
- Handmade gift to show

resource pack

- Bible memory poster (Ephesians 3)

to do

- Find a handmade item that someone gave you as a gift. Be ready to tell about it.

media connections

- "Peter Raises Tabitha from the Dead," from *Fun Bible Skits 2* by David M. Morrow
- "Bible Theater: Acts: Tabitha" by LifeKids.tv (YouTube)
- *Badger's Parting Gifts* by Susan Varley
- "Being Kind: The Music Video That Circled the World" (YouTube)

BUILD COMMUNITY

Welcome the children and gather the group together. Talk about handmade gifts. Show children the item you brought that someone made for you and tell about it—who gave it to you, when, and why. Let the children share about things others made for them.

teaching tip

The foundation of building community is your kindness, acceptance, and genuine interest in the children. They are also really interested in your life stories. Hearing and sharing stories gives the children common ground for working together as a group.

WORSHIP TOGETHER

Sing "Everybody's Welcome" from the *Shine Songbook and CD* (track 1, page 3) as you move in a line around the room. Encourage the children to spread out their arms when they sing "welcome."

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Gather in a seated circle. Hold a two to three minute time of silence. Invite each child to think about the people sitting on either side of them. In the silence they can ask God to be with them and bless them. Then pray:

God, we thank you for caring about us.

We ask you to hear our prayers for others.

(Pause for another moment of silence.)

Thank you, God, for hearing our prayers.

teaching tip

You can gather books and recordings to share with your group as an alternative to some other suggested activity.

Bible memory

Say the Ephesians 3:20–21 passage by phrases (see below). Divide into two groups. After you read the first phrase, Group 1 repeats it. Read the next phrase, and Group 2 repeats it, and so on. Say the passage again with Group 2 beginning the repeat.

**Now to him who by the power at work within us
is able to accomplish abundantly far more
than all we can ask or imagine,
to him be glory in the church
and in Christ Jesus to all generations,
forever and ever. Amen.**

experience

SHARE THE STORY

Open the Bible to Acts 9, and have the map from the resource pack ready. As you begin telling the story from page 292 in *Shine On*, point out the town of Lydda on the map from the resource pack. As you continue the story, point out the town of Joppa on the map. When the story talks about the women showing Peter the clothing, lay out several pieces of cloth.

WONDER AND REFLECT

Reflect on the story together. Children may consider the statements silently or share their thoughts.

- I wonder what it was like for Aeneas to stand up for the first time in eight years.
- I wonder how Tabitha heard the story of Jesus.
- I wonder how the women who gathered around Tabitha first met her.
- I wonder why Tabitha was chosen to live again when most who died were not raised back to life.
- I wonder what I can do to help others.

PEACE NOTES

Tabitha's friends loved her deeply. One reason was because she was kind and made clothing for people that needed it. Talk about people in your church who do things to help others. This might be sewing or knitting, or it might be driving people to the doctor, making meals for them, or cleaning their house. If possible, show an item that represents this sharing—a prayer shawl or comforter would be ideal. Pass it around for children to look at and feel.

Give each child some of the tiles from the "Together we can" game. Do not use the side with numbers and letters; use the tiles like a puzzle. Ask the children to work together to complete the image, then look for all the examples where someone is showing kindness.



Tabitha

Acts 9:32–43
Shine On, p. 292

supplies

- Bible
- *Shine On: A Story Bible*
- Prayer shawl, comforter, or other item to represent serving others

storytelling props

- Several pieces of fabric

resource pack

- Map
- "Together we can" game tiles

to do

- Practice telling the story using the map from the resource pack and pieces of cloth.
- Find an item to represent acts of care for others—ideally a prayer shawl or comforter, but it could be a kitchen item, toy car, broom, or something else.

explore

CREATE

Children can design Tabitha cards using pages 3 and 4 of the Multiage leaflet. Provide scraps of fabric, scissors, glue sticks, and other supplies. Use double-stick tape to attach the fabric pieces to the card. This will keep the paper from wrinkling. Instructions for making the card are on page 2 of the leaflet.

supplies

- Multiage leaflets
- Small pieces of ribbon and fabric; solid-color and patterned
- Scissors
- Glue sticks
- Double-stick tape
- Crayons, colored pencils



MOVE

Play a “Tabitha’s clothing” relay game. Divide the group into two teams. The first person in the line dresses the next person in the shirt you have brought. Once the shirt is on and at least two buttons fastened, the person takes the shirt off. The second person then dresses the third person in the line and so on. The last person in the line must quickly move to the front to put the shirt on the first player.

For smaller groups: Children can dress each other in the shirt as you time them for speed. Can they break their own record?

supplies

- Two large men’s shirts
- Timer (optional)

RETELL

Use scarves, robes, belts, and large pieces of cloth to make simple costumes. Stand in scenes like the first one shown on page 1 of the leaflet. Take a picture of the actors and read the first part of the story. Then move on to the next scene.

supplies

- Simple props and costumes (pillows, throw rugs or mats, scarves, robes, pieces of cloth, belts)
- Digital camera

LEAFLET

Children can work in pairs to do the word puzzle on page 2, and read about Tabitha’s name. *Solution to word triangles:* prayed, Peter, healed, Joppa, Tabitha.

supplies

- Multiage leaflets
- Pencils

other ideas

- Download “Piecing together our gifts” to learn about interesting quilts. From www.ShineCurriculum.com/Extras.
- Help pack your congregation’s food pantry items or relief packages.

bless

PRAY

Gather together in a circle. Ask a child to mark with stickers the categories on the “Faithful followers” poster from the resource pack that fit Tabitha (*New Testament, traveler, welcomed others, had a supporter*).

Then stand and pray the People’s prayer together from the “Ways to pray” poster from the resource pack.

God, we come together to worship and learn about you.

(Link elbows).

We praise you in our joys.

(Stand on tiptoe.)

We support each other in our sorrows. *(Bend knees.)*

In your love we meet *(step in),*
and in your love we part.

(Step out.)

Be with us as we go.

(Unlink elbows.)

Shine through us as we live.

(Raise arms.)

Amen. *(Lower arms.)*

SEND

Send the children with these words of encouragement based on Micah 6:8.

**God has told you what is good;
to do what is right, be kind to
others, and obey your God.**

Make sure to send leaflets home with the children.

supplies

- Multiage leaflets
- Small stickers

resource pack

- “Faithful followers” poster
- “Ways to pray” poster

Little ones respond well to stories, but the older they get the more I just need to be present when they are ready to talk.

—Jessica Hartzler Stock
University Heights, Ohio



leader’s closing prayer

Tabitha is a shining example of serving God by serving others. Her effectiveness was measured by the strength of the people’s love for her.

God, help me to serve willingly like Tabitha, using my talents and my strengths to make the world a better place. Amen.