

3. How does the widows' response to Tabitha's death highlight how meaningful her role was to the church in Joppa?
4. Who are some of the ordinary heroes God has used in your life?
5. How was God's grace through Tabitha's good deeds every bit as powerful as God's grace in raising her back to life?
6. What happens when we get so caught up in the ordinary that we fail to trust God for the extraordinary?
7. What are some of the ordinary ways God's grace should be on display in the church today?
8. What are some of the ordinary ways you would like to see God's grace on display in your life?



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360 DISCUSSION GUIDE



Few stories are as moving as the scene in an upper room where a group of grieving widows are mourning the loss of their good friend Tabitha. We know very few things about the church in Joppa. We don't know who started it. We don't know who their teachers were. We don't know who their elders were. We simply know the story of one extraordinary lady who devoted herself to doing good and helping the poor, whose absence would leave an enormous hole in the hearts of everyone who knew her, and indeed in the church as a whole.

Tabitha was the very definition of an ordinary hero—an ordinary person doing ordinary things to extraordinary effect because of the grace of God at work in her life.

Ironically, Tabitha's story would have been lost to us if not for an extraordinary act of grace performed by Peter. In a way reminiscent of Jesus' raising of Jarius' daughter, Peter prayed over Tabitha and the church in Joppa witnessed a powerful demonstration of the life giving power of the Spirit.

Our text affords us a wonderful opportunity to see God's grace at work in both the ordinary deeds of Tabitha and the extraordinary miracle performed by Peter.

GOD'S GRACE IN THE EXTRAORDINARY (vv. 36-42)

Luke includes Tabitha's story in the book of Acts because it is part of the larger story he is telling. The book of Acts opens with this remarkable statement, "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach...(Acts 1:1)" Luke's choice of verbs is astounding. He doesn't say my former book was about everything Jesus did and taught. He says my former book was only a beginning. Jesus is still doing and teaching, both through the apostles and through the church. Luke goes on to tell us how Jesus would continue to "do and teach" through his followers. He told them, "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:4-5, 8)." So the story of Acts is the story of how Jesus continues to work through his church by the power of the Holy Spirit. Tabitha's story is a vivid demonstration that Jesus is at work in and through Peter.

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.*

1. How does the miraculous raising of Tabitha demonstrate that Jesus is alive and well and working in and through his people?

2. In the New Testament, miracles are often referred to as signs. In other words they are not simply wonderful acts, they are wonderful acts that point to far more wonderful acts. What is the greater gospel truth that the raising of Tabitha points to?
3. While miracles are not exclusively confined to the Apostles in the book of Acts, they are most often performed by the Apostles and Luke goes out of his way to highlight this fact. Why is it especially important that Apostles are seen to be doing and teaching the same things Jesus did and taught?
4. What do you think God was trying to tell us through the miracles in Acts?
5. Should we expect God to continue to demonstrate his grace in extraordinary ways? Why or why not?
6. What happens when our desire for the extraordinary works of God eclipses our ability to see God at work in the ordinary events of everyday life?

GOD'S GRACE IN THE ORDINARY (vv. 36, 38)

While the story of Acts highlights the extraordinary acts of grace performed by the Apostles, there is far more to the story than the miracles. While the miracles are a huge part of the gospel story, there is a lot more to Jesus than the miracles. There is a phrase in Peter's explanation of the gospel that is easy to overlook. He told Cornelius, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him (Acts 10:38)." Did you catch it? "He went around doing good." The God of the universe entered our time and space with an amazing human touch. In fact he told us that our human touch would be the most visible demonstration that his grace was at work in our lives. "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:35)." There is no more vivid expression of what it means to love Christ's church than Tabitha's devotion to doing good and caring for the poor.

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1. In the paragraph immediately preceding Tabitha's story, Luke recounts the miraculous healing of a paralytic named Aeneas . He gives us very

