

My Community, My Life

Becoming An Impactful Community Citizen

The online dictionary defines community “as a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common”. The Kingdom lifestyle is our common characteristic and thus qualifies us as a community. As Kingdom citizens we should live the Kingdom lifestyle at all times. We understand that the lifestyle of a Kingdom citizen is not limited to the four walls of a church building, sanctuary or dedicated house of worship. Most of our time is spent with family and in the community. Jesus Christ exemplified community life and involvement during His ministry on earth. He settled on mountaintops to teach the crowd (Matthew 5:1-2 ‘beatitudes’) and visited people in their homes to bless them (Luke 10:38-42 ‘Martha’s home’; Luke 19:1-9 ‘Zachaeus’). He ministered in sanctuaries and yet did not forsake gathering in the community and with families. He showed special interest in the community such that most of the signs and wonders performed by Him were out in the community, and not in a designated building (John 5 ‘The Pool of Bethesda’; John 9 ‘Healing of The Man born blind’, etc).

The bible refers to us as the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13) and at all times, there is an expectation from salt; to be salty. There are many uses of salt, one of which is to improve the taste of food. As salt of the earth, we are expected to improve the “tastiness” of our community. The effect of salt never goes unnoticed when properly used. Salt is also used for preservation. As salt of the earth it is our business to preserve the integrity of our community. Let your community know you as the one who does not tolerate lies, use of foul language, cheating, etc. For example, live your life such that when your community sees you coming they will acknowledge that you are coming and will caution themselves not to use profane language when you are around. Let them get to a place where they understand that you will not tolerate words or actions that do not glorify your God, and for as long as they enjoy your company they cannot say or do those things. In this way you preserve the integrity of your environment or community, first when you are with them and sooner than later, even when you are not with them.

So, “My community, My Life” is a series aimed to bring awareness to us “The Kingdom Citizen” about our community on:

- how we can make an impact in our community by touching lives;
- how we can model Kingdom values within our community that will positively influence our environments, the system and the people living in it;

All these we will do using the word of God as our guide. There are many scriptures that emphasize the role of the believer within the community.

✓ **The Ministry of Tabitha (In Greek, Dorcas)**

Let’s begin by examining very closely the criterion for an impactful community citizen using the ministry of Tabitha (also known as Dorcas) as our guide.

Acts 9:36-42 (NIV)

“In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. 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!” 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. 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. 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. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.”

A) Criterion for an impactful community citizen

Disciple / Believer in Jesus Christ

This is the most outstanding criterion for becoming an impactful community citizen because this criterion serves as the unshakable foundation upon which all other kingdom virtues spring forth. Dorcas served her community well as we read earlier, however, I will like for us to see how the Bible introduces her and what preceded her community impact.

Acts 9:36a

“In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas);”

Other translations use the word “believer”; however, both “disciple” and “believer” denote a follower of Jesus Christ in this context. A disciple is a “follower,” someone who adheres completely to the teachings of another, making the teachings his or her rule of life and conduct. And in this case Jesus Christ is the one being followed. The root word for disciple is “discipline”. Therefore, a disciple is not just one who follows another but also adheres to the disciplines of the one being followed.

Now, Dorcas was a believer/disciple of Jesus and that set the tone for her community impact. All the kingdom virtues she manifested were directly tied to her relationship with the King. No doubt she made such significant impact in the lives of many in her community.

B) Characteristics of an impactful community citizen

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 (NIV)

“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built

on *it* endures, he will receive a **reward**. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.”

There are a few things I will like for us to take from the scriptures we just read.

- Jesus Christ is the foundation upon which every builder (in the Kingdom) should build.
- The quality of materials we use in building varies and matters, however, we choose what the material should be. Bare in mind that the quality of your building material will be tested and only that which stands will be rewarded. Our encouragement is that we should all shoot for gold by making the best use of our calling.
- There is a reward for every good work.

Previously we had examined that being a follower of Jesus Christ is the foundation upon which we can become impactful community citizens. 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 has brought more light to this truth by emphasizing Jesus Christ as the foundation.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, there are expected lifestyle virtues that we ought to abide by and a few of these were exemplified by Dorcas as she blessed her community.

i) She was consistent

Acts 9:36b (NIV)

“she was **always** doing good and helping the poor.”

Being consistent in our ways is a kingdom virtue. It is an expression of excellence and excellence is our praise unto God. Many scriptures emphasize the importance of being consistent. For example;

- **Hebrews 13:8 (NIV)**

“Jesus Christ is **the same yesterday and today and forever.**”

Therefore, presenting multiple personalities is not Christ-like. How would you feel if Jesus occasionally changed His mind about the criteria for our salvation? That will be very confusing to us and inconsiderate of Him. Would you agree?

- **Galatians 6:9 (NIV)**

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

Dorcas modelled this scripture well. We are told that she was always doing good. This scripture emphasizes the point with some depth. There is a reward for the consistent.

- **1 Corinthians 15:58 (NIV)**

“Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. **Always** give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”

When it comes to the work of the Lord, we are admonished to give ourselves fully to it. There is a reward.

It takes a person of understanding to be consistent. Sometimes, it is in continuity, consistency, etc. that impact is created. You might be required to do one thing multiple times in order to see change. You might be required to do the same thing many times for your impact to be felt by people in your community. Other translations tell us that “she was full of good works;” “she was always doing kind things;” etc.

Therefore family, if you have decided to make a difference in your community, consider modelling consistency as one of your Kingdom virtues.

- ii) **She did good/kind acts**

Acts 9:36b (NIV)

“she was always doing **good** and helping the poor.”

In order to become an impactful community citizen, doing good/kindness is imperative. Goodness is the fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22). Doing good will be to do things that will benefit another. That is exactly what Dorcas did for her community.

iii) She was a doer

Acts 9:36b (NIV)

“she was always doing good and helping the poor.”

Most often we wish many things for our community. We wish that someone will address the concerns in our political system. We wish that someone will address bullying in schools. We wish... we wish... we wish...Isn't that true? How about we step up and do something about the situation instead of wishing. Dorcas knew she could not “do good” to everyone. However, she chose a group of people to “do” good to. Family, your community awaits you, step up and “do” something. Some one will benefit from your “doing”.

iv) She was a helper

Acts 9:36b (NIV)

“she was always doing good and helping the poor.”

To help someone will mean you provide assistance, services or resources to a person or group of people on something they would not otherwise do by themselves. Dorcas was that kind of person who provided help to the poor. Every community can use additional help. Your goal is to prayerfully identify those areas where help is needed in your community and offer your assistance, services or resources. Remember, for all you do, you will be rewarded by the Father Himself.

v) She was obedient

James 1:27 (NIV)

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

Dorcas lived in obedience to the word. We are told in James 1:27 that looking after widows is something that the Father approves of. So, consider your ways today. Live in obedience to the word in all that you do.

vi) She surrounded herself with likeminded people

Acts 9:38-39 (NIV)

“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!” 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.”

I am convinced that the disciples believed in “raising up the dead”. Otherwise, Dorcas should have been kept and prepared for burial after her death. However, we are told that they (the disciples) heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Please come at once!” Subsequently, we see that, the reason why they wanted Peter was so that he could pray for Dorcas.

vii) She was a giver

Proverbs 19:17 (NIV)

“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.”

There is a reward reserved for givers. Choose to be a cheerful giver. Giving is an act of obedience to the word. However, your obedience in this area is only complete when you give with the right motives.

viii) She was selfless

We can safely conclude that Dorcas was not a selfish lady. Her community was positively impacted by her. Selfishness is not of God. It is of the devil. Do well to identify areas of selfishness in you and ask the Father to show you how to address them. One way to overcome selfishness is to become a giver on purpose. Give your time. Give things. Give money. Give. Give. Give. Do not keep everything to yourself.

ix) She understood the significance of investing in others

Acts 9:39b (NIV)

“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.”

The fact that widows cried; and not just cry, but also showed robes and other clothing that she made for them, tells us that Dorcas understood the importance of investing in other people. And these people showed evidence of her investments (robes and other clothing she made).

C) Life Lessons from the Ministry of Dorcas

-Not everyone will miss your absence.

Your absence could be as a result of death as in the case of Dorcas. Or it could be as the result of another assignment which requires that you change your crowd. However, always live purposefully wherever you find yourself and be diligent with every assignment given to you.

Acts 9:39b (NIV)

“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.”

Widows cried at Dorcas' death. The question I often ask myself is this "where was her family when she died?" We are only told "widows" cried when she died. What I learn from this portion of scripture is this "you may or may not be privileged to positively invest in your family for many reasons (their denial, distance, etc.), nevertheless, there is a community out there ready and willing to learn what you know; willing to benefit from your services, etc. So, do not allow all that God has invested in you to waste. Purposefully and prayerfully invest in others for His glory.

-For maximum impact, know your niche.

You are not called to impact everyone. Be comfortable with this truth. When Jesus came to earth, His goal was to save the lost. His crowd was very specific. There are specific people God will bring your way for specific reasons. Be spiritually sensitive to identify them and positively invest in them. The effect of what you do must not necessarily be felt by a large group for you to consider yourself successful or productive. I consider Dorcas a very successful and productive lady in her ministry to widows.

Acts 9:39b (NIV)

"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."

-Life is meant to be lived purposefully

Ask yourself this question. What would I like to be remembered for? I am inclined to believe that Dorcas lived with this understanding. She lived purposefully and when she died, she was remembered for something. Will your community miss your absence? What will your community remember you for? You can decide today what you will like your community to remember you for. The truth remains, not everyone will remember you. The few who remember you will not all remember you for the great things you did. Nevertheless, live life purposefully doing good and fulfilling your God given assignment and all these will not go unnoticed.

-Your life can minister to your community when alive and when dead

Acts 9:36-37, 40b-42 (NIV)

“In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); *she was always doing good and helping the poor.* About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room.

Turning toward the dead woman, he said, “Tabitha, get up.” She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. 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. *This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.*”

-There is a reward

Dorcas was rewarded with life. Her life was extended as a result of her good. The Bible clearly tells us in Galatians 6:9 (NIV) that “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up”. So clearly, there is a reward. We cannot determine the “kind” of reward, nevertheless, we can determination “whether or not” we will receive a reward.

✓ The Ministry of Stephen

Stephen as we all know was martyred when we read about him from the book of Acts 6 and 7. However, there is so much we can learn from his life prior to his martyrdom. The life of Stephen highlights to us the significance of godliness in the life of a community citizen. Stephen is introduced to us in Acts 6:5 (NIV) as “a man full of faith” and “the Holy Spirit”. He was chosen as one of the seven individuals to distribute food to the widows.

Let’s pause and think through these truths together in view of our lives today. Food distribution in our day and age could be likened to serving/volunteering in a soup/food pantry. Or, wherever volunteers gather for the purpose of distributing food to specific members in their community.

Who would have thought that in order to become a volunteer in your community, being full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit will count as one of the requirements? That was the case then and serves as a standard for us today. Becoming an impactful community citizen requires that from us – to be full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit. Like Dorcas and Stephen, you have to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Acts 6:1-7 (NIV)

“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.

We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.”

In order to be full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit, we need to be disciples of Jesus, by investing time in studying the word of God and in prayers.

Practical Lessons from the Life of Stephen

- **He lived conscious of who he was and his assignment as a child of God.** His assignment was not limited to distributing food. He sought opportunities to perform great wonders and signs among the people. So too, we should not limit our impact to just one area of service in our community. Serve your community physically and spiritually.

Acts 6:8 (NIV)

“Now Stephen, a man full of God’s grace and power, *performed great wonders and signs among the people.*”

- **He was full of the word of God (Acts 7:1-53 NIV).** Earlier, we saw that he was referred to as a man “full of faith”. When we interact and serve in our community, we will certainly face challenges, we will be confronted, and the best way to overcome the challenges is with the word of God. Our involvement in the community will sometimes be challenged from unlikely sources, however, like Stephen, we need to be prepared to use the word of God as our shield of faith.

Acts 6:9-11(NIV)

“Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. *But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.* Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, ‘We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.’”

- **While serving at his post as a food distributor to widows, Stephen overcame many challenges.** Yet, he chose to not compromise his believe in Jesus Christ. He eloquently shared the word of God with the people (Acts 7:1-53 NIV). After which he was martyred. The question for us today is this “How far are we willing to go for the Lord?”. Your ability to stand in the midst of challenges is only as strong as the revelation of God’s word in you.

Additional Points

- “Stephen” in Greek means "Crown". A crown is usually placed on the head. A crown symbolizes royalty. Royalty in the kingdom is our heritage. As impactful community kingdom citizens, we should serve others with the consciousness of who really are.

Excellence should be our watch word. Never settle for mediocrity even when you serve. Excellence is only complete in a person filled with faith (the word) and the Holy Spirit (His person and His presence).

- (Vs 8) – our identity should be demonstrated wherever we find ourselves (our services should be accompanied with power, signs, wonders and miracles).

- Community controversies identified in Acts chapter 6

Arguments (Vs 9)

Lies telling (Vs 11)

Physical abuse (fights) (Vs 12)

False witnesses (Vs 13)

- Other attributes of Stephen that I identified during my study

Spiritual intelligence. He was indeed knowledgeable about the word of God and was unashamed of it. Chapter 7:1-59).

He was forgiving. Even when his community stoned him, he said (Lord, do not hold this sin against them), then he fell asleep (died). Vs 60.

✓ Use The Berean Approach

In order to become an impactful community citizen, you need to be a student of the word of God. Create opportunities to study the word and know more about it. It will benefit you and those around you. The word will guide you and you will be in position to help guide others. The word of God tells us something brief yet very significant about the Bereans.

Acts 17:11 (NIV)

“Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”

This portion of scripture brings out comparisons between residents in the Berean community versus those in Thessalonica. I will like us to embrace the attitudes of the Berean Jews and make it ours. They were

- i) Of noble character. Other translations tell us they were open-minded; more receptive than those in Thessalonica.
- ii) They received the message with great eagerness.
- iii) They examined the scriptures everyday to see if what Paul said was true.

Isn't that outstanding?

In order to make a difference in our community, we need to know what they believe and how the system functions. Also, we need to intentionally listen and receive the message with a degree of interest (not because we plan to implement it). When the message is received, plan to examine it closely with your guide (the word of God) to make sure it is true or to make sure that the standards are godly.

As community citizens, we should avoid being closed-minded and shunning every opportunity to listen to others. The act of listening is not just for gaining information, it is also a demonstration of your interest and value for others. There is so much we can learn from each other.

✓ The Ministry of Priscilla and Aquilla

We continue to look at different ways from scripture on how we can become impactful community citizens. Priscilla and Aquilla are examples of individuals who made a difference in their community through their attitude listening to others, building others in the word and welcoming the church in their homes. They were knowledgeable about the word evidenced by

their ability to recognize when a person was not comprehensively communicating the word as in the case of Apollos.

Acts 18:24-28 (NIV)

“Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. *When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.* When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.”

This action by Priscilla and Aquilla was only possible because they were students of the word themselves. Otherwise, they would have accepted the message from Apollos as the complete message. My question to you today is this “how much of the word of God do you know?” If someone presents the gospel to you today, are you able to tell whether or not the presentation is complete? Or, will you just accept what you are being told?

It is very possible that we will not know everything at a given time, nevertheless, we can use the Berean approach – search scripture daily to make sure what is being taught is true. And in this case, complete.

Practical Lessons From the Ministry of Priscilla and Aquila

- Our study of the word and knowledge of the word benefits us and our community.
- We can help build individuals in our community to a place where they begin sharing the word more adequately.

- We can open up the doors of our homes as a meeting place for God's children.
- When you truly desire to serve the Lord but you do not have all the knowledge or resources to fully understand the word, He sends people to you who will help you to have the right understanding. What happened with Apollos is very similar to what happened to the Ethiopian Eunuch when Philip was sent to him.

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