

ACTS: MORE THAN A MIRACLE

October 30, 2022

Stuck and lifeless. That is exactly how I felt a year ago.

I was out-of-shape—physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally. I had neglected the more important things in life and felt paralyzed in my own situation. Sure, I was a pastor and I was doing the work I was called to, but, I still felt stuck and lifeless. I, like all of you, can take a shower, get dressed, and walk through life without allowing anyone to see the deeper issues going on.

This happens, though, doesn't it? Life has a way of sucking the joy and purpose out of just about anything. It doesn't mean we don't continue on with life—what other option do we have. In fact, most of us carry on with the appearance that everything is ok. But, deep down...we feel stuck and lifeless.

If you're like me, you've tried it all. You've looked to other people to help you get unstuck. You've looked to entertainment to bring new life. You've read the Christian self-help books for answers. You got the gym membership and signed up for the meal plan. You bought the thing you thought you needed. You took the vacation you deserved. You made a budget for one month. You bought the six-pack or the bottle of wine because at least, for a moment, it made you feel better.

Listen, I too tried it all. But, I felt no less stuck and lifeless than before.

It pains me to tell you this sort of thing as your pastor. But, believe it or not, I struggle with all of the same things you do. Matter of fact, because of the nature of my vocation it is very easy to end up feeling stuck and lifeless.

Last week I was fortunate to spend three days in Colorado Springs in the middle of The Garden of the Gods with 50 other pastors and church leaders who are dealing with similar situations. Many bailed on their call to ministry because they feel stuck and lifeless in it. Others—on the verge of hanging up their hats in ministry—were looking for something to restore and revive their ministry.

I was there to share my story. To tell those who were present that while feeling stuck and lifeless is a very real experience, there is a remedy. Almost exactly 1 year ago I was right there. And then I discovered the one thing that brought restoration and revival to my life.

Today, I want to share the thing that is keeping us feeling stuck and lifeless, the remedy for it, and how it has changed my life and can change yours.

So, grab your phone and open up the **YouVersion** app. Go to “more” and “events” and find Genesis Church to follow along with everything I’m going to cover today. By the way: did you know you can take notes on that page and save them for later? If you have your Bible with you, we will be in Acts 9.

Leading up to Acts 9 we are aware of a guy named Saul who is doing everything in his power to extinguish this new “Jesus Movement” in 1st Century Judea. So zealous is he, that he sets out toward Damascus (a town just outside Jerusalem) to imprison any and all Jesus followers living there.

Along the way, Saul’s worldview is shaken when he collides with Jesus on the road to Damascus. Jesus appears to Saul and everything changes.

Last week, we saw what happened after Saul becomes a follower of Jesus. Needless to say, it wasn’t a great start. Now zealous to let people know about Jesus, Saul begins preaching to anybody he comes into contact with about Jesus. The only problem is: he hasn’t really gained any clout among the believers in the area to do so.

Remember: Saul has been imprisoning and even approving the execution of Christians in the 1st Century. He is the most feared man in the world for Christians at the time. And, now, because of his encounter with Jesus he has changed teams. You can imagine the skepticism the other believers had regarding Saul.

So disturbed by Saul’s commitment to follow Jesus, the believers in Damascus and Jerusalem force him out of the city. Eventually Saul head’s down to Arabia for almost a decade before arriving again in Jerusalem to begin his ministry.

Meanwhile, while Saul is in Arabia, Luke turns his attention to Peter on the outskirts of Jerusalem. We will pick up the story in Acts 9, starting in verse 32:

Acts 9:32-35

32 Meanwhile, Peter traveled from place to place, and he came down to visit the believers in the town of Lydda. **33** There he met a man named Aeneas, who had been paralyzed and bedridden for eight years. **34** Peter said to him, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you! Get up, and roll up your sleeping mat!” And he was healed instantly. **35** Then the whole population of Lydda and Sharon saw Aeneas walking around, and they turned to the Lord.

Peter is the clear leader among leaders in the 1st Century church at this time. And, while the church began in Jerusalem it is beginning to spread to outer parts

of Judea. So, Peter heads to places he has heard of its expansion—including Lydda. Lydia is about 30 miles west of Jerusalem—about halfway between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean. And, it is there that Peter meets Aeneas—a man paralyzed for almost a decade. Their interaction leads to Aeneas’ full healing in the name of Jesus—something Peter knew could happen because of Jesus’ words in John 14:

John 14:12-14

12 “I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father. **13** You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father. **14** Yes, ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it!

Peter says: “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you! Get up and roll up your sleeping mat!” And, as a result many of the people in Lydda and the surrounding area place their faith in Jesus.

But, Peter isn’t finished. He continues his travels all the way to Joppa. Joppa is an important city because of its proximity to the Mediterranean. Today it sits just south of Tel Aviv.

While in Joppa, Peter applies the words of Jesus in John 14 again:

Acts 9:36-38

36 There was a believer in Joppa named Tabitha (which in Greek is Dorcas). She was always doing kind things for others and helping the poor. **37** About this time she became ill and died. Her body was washed for burial and laid in an upstairs room. **38** But the believers had heard that Peter was nearby at Lydda, so they sent two men to beg him, “Please come as soon as possible!”

Joppa is about 12 miles north east of Lydda—a walk of about 6 hours. By the time Peter gets to Dorcas, she has been dead a while. In fact, even before the two men go to Peter, Luke tells us Dorcas has already been prepared for burial. Nevertheless Peter responds to their request and goes with them:

Acts 9:39-43

39 So Peter returned with them; and as soon as he arrived, they took him to the upstairs room. The room was filled with widows who were weeping and showing him the coats and other clothes Dorcas had made for them. **40** But Peter asked them all to leave the room; then he knelt and prayed. Turning to the body he said, “Get up, Tabitha.” And she opened her eyes! When she saw Peter, she sat up! **41** He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then he called in the widows

and all the believers, and he presented her to them alive.**42** The news spread through the whole town, and many believed in the Lord. **43** And Peter stayed a long time in Joppa, living with Simon, a tanner of hides.

In both cases, Aeneas and Dorcas, Peter simply follows in the footsteps of Jesus. After all, Peter spent 3 years watching Jesus teach and perform miracles. He watched what can happen when the name of Jesus is declared over person's life. He knows what happens what happens when Jesus' love for humanity is given freely.

Restoration and revival happen when Jesus is present.

Both Aeneas and Dorcas are in need of something outside themselves to bring healing. In Aeneas' case, he is stuck—literally and figuratively. Being a paralyzed man didn't only mean he couldn't move about freely, but it also meant whatever life he had before his paralyzation had been extinguished as well.

Crippled men and women in the 1st Century were typically looked down upon. It was believed by most that some sin in their life brought on their crippled state. In other words, it would have been assumed that Aeneas is paralyzed because of his own sin. Therefore, he would be considered unclean and separated from the main community in his city.

Aeneas is stuck...big time. He can't move and he can't find anyone to help him move.

Meanwhile, Dorcas has died a sudden death. Based on the reaction of the people around her, her death happened as a surprise. And, because of her reputation as someone who has brought so much meaning and purpose to the community of believers in Lydda, Peter is summoned to help her.

Dorcas is lifeless—literally. Despite the fact that she has so much more to give, she is dead.

Again I will ask: are you feeling stuck or lifeless today? Are you stuck in a pattern of sin? Are you stuck in a dead end job? Do you feel stuck with your finances? Do you feel like there is very little hope for your future? Do you feel stuck with your diagnoses?

Do you need restoration today?

Or maybe you're feeling lifeless today. Do you feel depressed and sad? Is sin and rebellion causing you to feel like you'll never be free? Are you just going through the motions of life, but not truly living as God intended?

Do you need revival today?

If so, I believe you have come to the right place. Because there is only one thing that can truly restore and revive a person's life: the love of Jesus.

The love of Jesus restores and revives people.

Listen: Luke includes the story of Peter in Lydda and Joppa because he wants his readers (us) to see just how powerful the love of Jesus really is. All Peter says to Aeneas is the name of Jesus and he is healed. All Peter does to heal Dorcas in Joppa is pray and say "Get up!"

Aeneas is restored. Dorcas is revived. All because of the love of Jesus.

You see: there is power in Jesus' name because He loves us. He wants us to experience restoration and revival even on this side of heaven. And, let me tell you from personal experience:

The love of Jesus STILL restores and revives a person.

One year ago, I sat on a Zoom call with a pastor who I barely knew. He was connected with me for the purpose of being a coach for 6 months. I was ready to take in everything he said. I was ready to hear about all of the new ways to pastor a church. I was ready to listen to all of the brilliant ideas he had on how to create greater health and growth in the church.

But all he would talk about is the love of Jesus. Honestly: I got kind of annoyed. I was like, "Yeah. Yeah. I get it. Jesus loves me. What do you think of online church?" But he wouldn't bite. He just kept coming back to the love of Jesus.

And, then, like Peter to Aeneas and Dorcas, it was if he reached through my laptop's screen and said, "Ryan, Jesus Christ heals you." Only, all he really said is: "I love you, Ryan."

Nobody, other than my wife has ever said those words to me. Nobody. And, in that moment I began to experience the restoration and revival through the love of Jesus.

I didn't realize it but I need restoration. I needed revival. I was stuck and lifeless. I had been doing ministry for 20 years, and it had left me depleted and in need of something outside myself to revive me.

It was in that moment (and the moments to come) that proved to me:

The love of Jesus restores and revives people.

It didn't happen over night. So much shame and hurt was hiding in the cracks of my life. But, over time, little by little, I began to feel restored. I began to feel alive again.

And I am here to tell you: the same love and the same power that restored Aeneas and revived Dorcas is STILL AVAILABLE for you. The love of Jesus is at hand. It is within reach.

All you have to do is receive it.

Do you know how much shame I have carried with the idea that somehow I have to work my way toward God's love? Despite the fact that I know God's love is given not earned, the shame and hurt in my life kept telling me there had to be something more.

It wasn't until I simply received the love of Jesus to restore and revive me that I began to do the things of God with joy and not shame.

So, let me ask you:

Do you need to be restored today? Are you allowing sin and shame and your past to determine who you are today? Do you need the loving power of Jesus to restore your back to health?

Do you need to be revived today? Are you feeling lifeless, purposeless, and hopeless? Do you need the loving power of Jesus to revive your life?

Jesus often said, "The kingdom of God is at hand—it is near." Meaning, restoration and revival is within reach. It is right before you.

Will you receive it today?