

Lifted up, then sent to serve

HIS MOTHER-IN-LAW CAME OVER for a visit, and now she was sick in bed. Does this sound like the beginning of a bad joke? Actually it's the beginning of an interesting Bible story.

One day Jesus visited the home of the two brothers, Peter and Andrew, and Peter's mother-in-law was there. The Bible doesn't tell us much about her. I wonder how she felt when her daughter married an outspoken fellow like Peter. Did she worry about how they would get along? Would her daughter be happy as the wife of a fisherman, with those long nights he had to spend outdoors? Did she worry about his safety when storm-clouds blew over the Sea of Galilee? Did she wonder how they'd make a living on those occasions when the fish nets came up empty and the sales price of fish was low?

And how did Peter's mother-in-law feel when he left those fish nets and began following a rabbi named Jesus? Did she have some doubts about all of this at first? Did she mutter under her breath, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" At one point in Jesus' busy ministry, the crowds grew so large and the demands of the work so great that his disciples couldn't even eat. Jesus' family worried that he was overdoing it at the expense of his own health (Mark 3:20, 21). Surely Peter's mother-in-law felt concerned as well.

Had she planned on her daughter being a preacher's wife? Or a missionary? Years later Peter took his "believing wife" along with him on his preaching

trips (1 Corinthians 9:5). How did his mother-in-law feel about that? Though their faith sustains them, it's hard for parents, in-laws, and grandparents when their children and grandchildren move across the world to serve on foreign mission fields.

The Bible doesn't answer all of our questions about Peter's mother-in-law, but it does tell about a time when she "was in bed with a fever, and they told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them"

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(Mark 1:30, 31). Admittedly, this miracle seems minor in comparison with Jesus' other wondrous feats. Getting rid of a woman's fever doesn't seem nearly as impressive as feeding the 5,000, raising the dead, or healing a man who had been blind since birth. Yet, Mark considered it important enough to include in the first chapter of his Gospel, shortly after telling how Jesus called his first disciples. Perhaps this miracle helps to explain Peter's intense loyalty to Christ. He had seen Jesus' power at work not only among the crowds but also in his own home. A member of his own family had been touched and healed by the Master's hand.

Luke's Gospel adds a few more details (Luke 4:38, 39). As we might expect from a physician, Luke notes that the woman suffered not merely from a

fever, but a "high fever." He also mentions Jesus' bedside manner: the Lord "bent over her and rebuked the fever." And then Luke highlights the immediacy of the woman's cure: "She got up at once and began to wait on them." Peter's mother-in-law didn't waste any time. Once Jesus made her whole, she immediately got up and served—showing her love for Christ the best way she knew how. She understood an important truth: When the Lord lifts you up, he also sends you out to serve.

That's the way it ought to be in the family of God. When Christ touches our lives, we need to get up at once and serve others! Whether we're fresh with newfound faith or we've been Christians for years, we shouldn't just sit around expecting others to wait on us; we should get up and meet others' needs. When the hand of Jesus touches us, the crippling fever of sin gives way to a fervor for service.

Over the years I've known many women in the church who understand this principle. They are wives, mothers, and grandmothers who serve their families well, or they are single women who are "concerned about the Lord's affairs" and whose "aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit" (1 Corinthians 7:34). If you know women like these, thank the Lord for them. And follow the example of Peter's mother-in-law: Get up and serve. ■



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