

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Acts 6:1 as we continue on Wednesday nights going through this accounting from the Lord of the early church. In fact, there's about thirty years of information here in terms of the church's growth. It is a great book because it describes what happens when the Holy Spirit falls upon God's people, and it is, I think, a model to us as a church. What would God have us to do? If we had a hundred things to choose, what would we pick, and why would we go in that direction?

We've been asking you, as we've been going through the book of Acts, to mark down in your Bibles when you get to some of those places where you can answer the question - what type of people does God use? Because we will find those people here in the book, and then we can pray to be like them and God, use us like You've used them.

Chapters 3 and 4 is a story of the healing of a lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. He was over forty years old. He had lain begging at his gate for many, many years. One day God touched him. Peter and John were headed to the afternoon prayers in the Temple at 3:00 when the Lord spoke to Peter, and Peter reached out his hand to this man and offered to give him what God had given to him. And the Lord raised this fellow up by His Spirit. And obviously it caused quite a commotion. He was doing cartwheels, I believe, in the Temple area, in the Porch there, and Peter got to preach his second sermon. The first one is in Acts 2. And there're a lot of them, and you should study the sermons in the book of Acts because it'll teach you about how you share your faith. Always talk about sin and our responsibility, always the need for repentance, always the solution that God made through His Son - the promise of His Spirit. The sermon that we have recorded in our Bibles is ninety-two words long. Peter was stopped from preaching; he never got finished. He was arrested by the religious folks who had just had enough of this Jesus movement. And so Peter was taken with John and arrested, kept overnight by the council; it was late in the day. But yet we are told that tons of people got saved anyway, and God's Word was powerful. Well, they brought these kids out, these young apostles, the next day and told them, "Don't do it again. No more preaching in Jesus' name." And Peter said, "We've got to obey the Lord. You do what you want, we've got to obey the Lord," and they went back to the

church, to friendlier confines, and they prayed not for deliverance from oppression but for boldness in the face of it. And the whole place was shaken again, and the Holy Spirit was poured out again upon them.

And then in chapter 5 we came to the first opposition the early church faced from within. Not from without, which was where everything had been coming from but now by a couple of folks in the middle of the church who were deceivers and self-glory seekers, and God dealt with them very severely. They both died on the steps of the church - Ananias and Sapphira. Great fear came upon the church. You can just imagine. And not just great fear, but the people really took their commitment to the Lord seriously. And so, at the end of chapter 5 (which we finished last week), a very much more severe impact came upon the church. The boys had been threatened back in chapter 4, but they'd continued to do what the Lord wanted. They were arrested again in chapter 5. The Lord busted them out of jail, if you will, and told them to go out and to preach again, and they were to stand right where they'd been arrested. And it just produced even more anger, and now the end of chapter 5 (verse 33) it says that they planned to kill them now. Now the plot against the church was violence at all costs.

Tonight we start in chapter 6 with really a very long story about the life of a couple of guys - Stephen and Philip - which are kind of back to back before we get to Paul. And we're going to spend the next four weeks or so with Stephen, looking at his ministry. Tonight we're only going to look at seven verses (the first seven verses of chapter 6) because we'd like to get the context for what is going on in the early church - how this growth, this exponential growth, affected the church itself and how the enemy was coming against them. And you find, at least early on here, that it was the enemy stirring from within that caused trouble again. This time it was the complaining of one group of Christians against another group - criticizing the leadership of the apostles, questioning the motives of the people serving, cries of abuse - and how did the church handle and solve that.

Verse 1 of chapter 6 begins with the words, "Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution." The word "disciples" - this is the first time you find it in the book of Acts. The word "*mathetes*" means learner, those who were growing in the Lord. And it is also the first time that we read the word "multiplying." I love how God's math works. Chapter 2:40 we were "added" to the church. Now the converts are being

"multiplied." The growth is exponential. Verse 7 of chapter 6 will say they were "multiplied greatly" in town. This was just a ministry in one city, mind you, in the city of Jerusalem.

There are certainly, in the church, days of growth followed by days of almost pruning. We've seen it in the church. We've been here a long time. You'll grow by a hundred or two hundred people in just a matter of weeks and months, and then you'll lose two hundred people. Somebody will move. A hundred people retire. We had fifty-one families that we're aware of move out of state this last year - most of them to retire. It's cheaper to live elsewhere than in California, as you might suspect. So, you miss those folks and especially if they're your core group. I always think the Wednesday night is the real church. Sorry if you're not here. I didn't mean you but everybody around you. (Laughing) There's something about those who just go to church - they want to know, and they're hungry. So there are times that the church kind of goes through these pruning sessions. The Lord adds a bunch of people, and then He strengthens the church to be able to handle the growth. And then there're even times of "blessed subtraction" like we read in chapter 5. Sometimes it's good that God moves people along - they're not happy, they're upset, they're troublemakers or worse. God adds, God multiplies, God subtracts. God never divides. He leaves that to us, unfortunately.

So, at a time when everything seemed to be going good, this subtraction occurred in chapter 5, and praise the Lord when that happens. But remember there were three thousand added in chapter 2:41. We then read many more came in Acts 2:47. And then we read, in chapter 4:4, the number grew to five thousand men plus women and children. By the end of chapter 5 (verse 14) we just read that the believers were "increasingly added," and now we come to the multiplication phase. It is guesstimated (by scholars far smarter than I am) that the first six months of the new church saw twenty thousand believers come to faith. Even if that's half right, that's amazing, isn't it, that the Lord was just so moving. And I suspect that He would want to do that again, that His heart.....the only reason the Lord's not here tonight for the church is for the lost, don't you think? His heart is patient. He waits. If it wasn't for them, you'd be with Him. And that would be His will as well. So, God help us to be those who have a vision to go out. And understand that, at least during this time, there were no big church buildings. In fact, there were no church buildings for 300 years. None. They met in the Temple for a good long time, until they were chased out, and they were eventually chased out just about in every city that they went. They would meet in rented places, house to house. But

to manage all of those thousands of people, to meet their needs and stuff, it must have been tremendously frustrating to the Sanhedrin, to the religious opposition. So, into this atmosphere of growth and excitement, here comes Satan's next little ploy to slow down the work, if you will. And this time it was a conflict that some Christians yelled against others, that they were being discriminated against, things were unfair, and it was kind of a church in conflict.

I think one growing pain of any church is the inability of leadership to be personally involved at every point of ministry. The apostles were not capable of doing that. As a result, this grumbling began (and this murmuring), and it was brought to them, but it doesn't sound like they were aware of it or even a part of it, if you will. They were busy teaching and praying and doing the things that God had given to them to do. But there was this difficulty, and it's a problem that arose (here in chapter 6) for a good reason - the church was growing by leaps and bounds. Right? And the early church, like every church that grows, needs to be willing to adapt or to change to keep up with the growing needs of a growing body. And not everyone in churches likes change. We stopped doing bulletins. You should have seen the letters we got. It's a piece of paper, for crying out loud. "Oh, no. It's much more than that. Lifeline." Okay. So you can imagine if you didn't get a chance to vote on the carpet color. I didn't either, by the way. I can't see color very good. Or the paint on the walls. There's something about change that we're slow. And it encourages me that the early church is not perfect in its struggle to kind of keep up as the problems arose. I find that the leadership in the book of Acts handled it well when they got to it. They did it in a godly manner. They addressed the needs in a very straightforward understanding. When we started Morningstar in 1984 (in a house), we had three couples. But our first service was April 21 of 1985. Seventy people showed up. And that was a lot because fifty had come to wish us well and then to leave. Right? So we had, for the first six months in our church, two ladies that were the entire nursery ministry and Sunday school. They worked their tails off just to meet the needs of the people. And I remember it like it was yesterday. They had to come early to clean up classrooms. They stayed late to put everything away. It was just so much work. Today we have more people working in our Sunday school than we had in our first service of seventy people. There're far more folks that are now serving in the Sunday school than that. And yet you have to adapt, adjust. We do three services now on Sunday. Sometimes we end up having to overflow people into a room next door. It's not ideal. You want people together. But actually for some apparently it is ideal. People will stand over there and hope you open up. They like sitting over there where people don't bother them,

I guess. But in any event, you have to be open to change. You have to be willing to grow with what God is doing. And some people don't like growth. They like the small group feel. They like to know everybody. If they don't know everybody, "I gotta go somewhere else. It's too big for me. I don't like it." But, really, how many people can you know well? I'm thinkin' if you know twenty people really well - that you call them your friends, you spend time with them, you go out to dinner, you know about their families' needs - that's a lot! So, at that point, the church should never be more than twenty. But God didn't get the memo. You see, now He's got fifteen thousand people in a matter of six months, gathered. There's nothing wrong with lots of people. But just get involved somewhere. Be accountable. Help others. You're not going to know everybody. I honestly sometimes meet people, and I'll say, "How long have you been here?" and they go, "Sixteen years," and I'll say, "I don't even know your name." Because they've never said anything, they sit over there, they get involved in their stuff, they're happy. But it's not my relationship with them that has made them happy. God has been faithful, and they're plugged in where they're plugged in, and that's pretty much where they spend their time. Right? So we've got to be open, I think. When we moved our prayer meetings from a house (because that's where we were meeting) into the church, the people that hosted our prayer meeting in a house came and said, "We're leaving the church because you stole our ministry away." And I said, "We've just got more room now." "No. That's ours." And I said, "I'm sorry. That doesn't belong to you at all. It doesn't belong to me, either. We want people to come together and pray." But that's the kind of thing. If you're not willing to grow, then you're gonna struggle. Because it's all about changing. Kids grow up, and you have to treat 'em differently. You'd like to keep 'em little and on your lap, but it doesn't stay that way.

So here's a problem. In the church comes grumbling from a bunch of Hellenists who believed that their widows, which were now being ministered to by the church, were being neglected, and the Jews, who had their own kind of widows, were being taken care of. And so the grumbling was certainly a work of the flesh. Right? Grumbling, dissension, heresy (Galatians 5:20). There's a whole list of these kinds of interpersonal sins that find their way into the church. But the need was real. The grumbling was sinful, the need was real.

Hellenists and Hebrews. Two, really, groups of Jews, usually. The Hebrews, as we call them in our Bibles, were (at least in this context) the people who lived in Jerusalem. They followed the old ways. They had traditions of the past. They

lived in Jerusalem. And even today, you go to Israel, Jerusalem is the religious city. There're a bunch of religious rules in every place you turn. You go to the Galilee, man, you feel like you're in Big Bear. Everything's fine. But in Jerusalem there's a lot of tension always. It's where the religious people gather. And it was certainly true in Jesus' day. And so they, the Hebrews, felt they were superior to the Hellenists because the Hellenists were people who, most often, lived outside of Israel. They lived in Greek cultures. They might have even been converts to Judaism. But they brought with them, into their Jewish practices, influences from Greeks and from Romans, wherever they lived. So maybe they didn't sing the same songs you did, they didn't dress the same way you did, they might not have kneeled down when you did, they might not have had the same attitude to some of the sacrifices and all. They were in love with the Lord, they believed in one God, but they brought with them different practices than the Jews in town, if you will. They were influenced by the much more liberal Greek culture. So the Hebrews in Israel saw the Hellenists as almost like second-class citizens. "You guys aren't really as holy as we are. We live in Jerusalem. We've got Jerusalem hats. And you're from Athens, and you're a Jew. Or you're from South Africa, and you're a Jew, and you bring your culture with you. You're an Ethiopian. You're a Jew, but not like we're Jews. We live here." And it divided them anyway. The Hellenists were proud of their freedom and of their culture. They were unaffected by the strict conditions, if you will, imposed upon life in Jerusalem. They both were now born again. They were both planted into the church, they were both loving Jesus, and they were both calling upon His name. But they still had a lot of stuff that they brought with them in terms of getting along, if you will, with one another.

So the church began to provide for widows who had no family or family support for themselves. In fact, if you want to know how the church stood on supporting widows, you can read 1 Timothy 5. The entire chapter Paul writes to Timothy and says, "Here's how you deal with widows in the church. These qualify, these don't. If they're qualified, this is what we expect of them." And as the church grew and organized, there were certainly some things that they watched over and were careful with, if you will. But the cries of the Hellenists here were that somehow their widows - Hellenist widows - were being deprived of the daily food and being deprived and neglected of the food distribution and that the Jewish widows were getting the food before them. And so there were cries of favoritism, and you know how that goes pretty quickly. Was it true? I don't know. No comment is made here. The apostles, when they get this handed to them (this problem), also don't seem to address that. They didn't ask if it was true. They just figured, "All

right. If that's how they feel, then let's do this." And they don't address the validity of the accusation. They just sought to eliminate the conflict without being distracted from the work that they'd been given to do which was - they were the teachers. The church was as big as it was because these guys were teaching the Word of God. It was the cause of the problem, their work. They couldn't stop that and go, "All right. Let me figure this out." But they needed some help.

We read in verse 2, "Then the twelve" (these apostles) "summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, 'It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.'" Now I want you to notice that the apostles were in a place of leadership. Church government, biblically, is not a democracy. It is an oversight by elders whom God appoints. Congregational rule - that's where everybody votes - is not a biblical practice; it ignores God's specific callings. It's kind of like in your house - your parents probably don't want you voting. They'll just tell you, "This is where we're goin' on vacation." You're not going to, "Well, I'd like to vote for the Grand Canyon." "Well, yeah, you're not gettin' a vote. Dad gets ten votes." You know how that works? And it is kind of that way. Now, it's not a dictatorship. Churches are to be run by a multitude of counselors. But notice that the apostles got together, and then they called the congregation to say, "Here's the decision we've made that we think best addresses the problem." Church leadership is not perfect. No church is, either. But godly men leading the church is biblical, and it is correct, and it is the reason why you should pray for the pastors and those who are in places of oversight.

I remember hearing a story I really liked a couple of months ago about four pastors who were all in a denomination. They'd gone to a leadership summit, and the subject for the leadership summit was "being transparent with one another" and how you should share your problems and share what you're going through and pray for one another and all. And so at coffee they thought they'd try it, and the first guy said, "Well, guys, let me just tell you. I have a problem with drinking. Sometimes I like to go out and drink, and I know I shouldn't. It's a stumbling block, but I just have a problem with it." And the second guy said, "Well I love to gamble. It's one of my pet peeves - I can't get enough of gambling." And the third guy said, "Well, I've always cheated on my taxes. I just feel like they owe it to me." And then they turned to the fourth guy, and they said, "What is your problem?" And he said, "You know, I'm so thankful I don't have any of those problems." He said, "I only have one little problem." He said, "I like to gossip" (Laughing) "and tell everyone what I hear."

Well, the church isn't perfect. Right? And I'm thankful for the book of Acts because, if nothing else, it puts the truth before us in the things that they had to face. The suicide of Judas was dealt with directly. The judgment of Ananias and Sapphira was laid out. This conflict among believers in the church itself - the split between Paul and Barnabas here in a few years - the honest rendering so that you know God's heart. You see how things go. This isn't unusual. We still find the same issues.

So the need, here, that arose - whether it was legitimate or not, it was certainly perceived to be that way - gave an opportunity for the apostles (the folks who were making decisions) to examine how they were doing things. And they had to be open to change. Look, they had to be flexible. We need, and always need, I think, overseers who are willing to be flexible, who are willing to seek the Lord and ask God for direction and wisdom. There're hard choices that have to be made, and it isn't so easy to live on last year's, "This is the way we've always done it!" But that doesn't work here. Because it was fine until this happened. I think it was Henry Beecher who wrote about past success, "It's last year's nest, and the birds have flown away." So, settling is a horrible thing. But notice they're not willing to settle in. They want to just move forward.

Now I want you to look at what the advice of the apostles was to the body as a whole. They said, first of all, "It's not desirable that we would leave the word of God to go and to take care of this issue" (serving the tables to these ladies that were alone). The word "desirable" is literally the word for unreasonable. It's not reasonable, if you will. "It's not our best move." To the apostles, it was common sense that they should continue to do what had brought the problem to begin with - teach the Word of God. People were getting saved. They were being multiplied now. You can't stop that. I mean, that was the birthing room. That's where everybody was coming in. They created the problem, so they felt like, "Gosh, we can't stop and do this then." It doesn't mean that serving tables was beneath them. In fact, if you look at the qualifications they're going to set out for serving tables, you'd say, "Man, they set a high bar." Or was it less important. It was just a matter of calling. First things first. So, it is vital that you never lose sight of your calling when growth occurs. And they didn't. But it does amaze me how, so often, people settle in, and they never move. Thirty years later, they're still in the same place. But God's got stuff to do. People always say, "Hey, were you around in the Jesus movement?" Yeah, I liked it. It was the coolest thing. I showed a movie once at Calvary Downey. Had 500 people get saved. Worst movie I ever saw.

"Thief In The Night." You guys ever see this movie? It was terrible. But it was so anointed. It was cool in those days. You can't see that today in very many places. But that was then, and this is now, and God's got something to do now.

So, the apostles listened to the cries of the people. They tried to come up with a solution. They realized what they could do and what they couldn't do. They prioritized their time, and they came up with, I thought, a very interesting solution. I've borrowed it lots of times. They said this, "Let's have the people who noticed the problem be the solution. You complained. You said, 'Here's the problem. Our Hellenist people are not getting fed.' " They choose seven Hellenists. Now we know that because all of the names that we are given are Hellenist names - they're Greek names. They're Jews, but they're Hellenists. So, "You see the problem, you go fix the problem. I'm not gonna go fix it for you. You go fix it. Pick a bunch of guys that we trust - that are Hellenists - to go take care of Hellenist widows. So we have nobody complaining. Let their own take care of their own." Pretty smart move I think. It is the first organizational step in this early church. Up to now, it's just been thousands of people getting saved. Now they have to organize. It's not ungodly to organize. It's necessary. But there isn't an overabundance of organization, even in the early church, through the book of Acts. But there's some. Paul will write to the Ephesians (4:11-16) about pastors and teachers and evangelists and prophets for the equipping of the saints, for the edification of the body, till we all come to the unity of the faith, and every part supplies. There's a place for us, every one of us. And so here's the first ministry development. It's a new ministry overseen by those who were determined by the church to be faithful, and they were the ones who also recognized the problem.

"So here's what we're going to do." Verse 3, " 'Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.' " Now the disciples set forth to the church four criteria for those who would become (and we'll call them) deacons, because a deacon is one office in the church (1 Timothy 3, Titus as well). A deacon was someone who took care of the physical needs of the church. An usher would be a deacon. He takes care of the physical well-being of the church. An elder is responsible for the spiritual well-being of the church. There aren't too many offices in the Bible. But those are two. And these were deacons. "You take care of the physical needs of the church." They were going to be approved by the saints for their godliness. They will then be commissioned by the apostles to

exercise authority in this area. No mention, by the way, is made of these guys having any business background or, somehow, financial talents or skills. The focus was solely upon their spiritual qualifications, and I think it's important that you notice that because so often we will exalt people that, "Oh, he sings so good, he plays guitar so phenomenally, he's great at whatever he does." But God's interested in the spiritual. Right? He can use the likes of us just because we are walking with Him.

And so here is the focus. They are "among you," they have "good reputation," they are "full of the Holy Spirit," and they have "wisdom." Start with the words "from among you." I think that, biblically, I could make a strong case for you that every church should pick its leadership and its servants from their own church, that it is foolish to try to go to somebody else's church and go, "Hey, we'd like to have you come over here." It happens. People bribe worship leaders and bribe pastors and offer them money, and, "If you just come over here, here's what we'll give to you." It's ridiculous. God establishes a church, we should serve in the place that God puts us. No hirelings. That would be someone that comes from without. In the body to serve the body. Look "among you." Those are the people you know. Now I should tell you that we have only hired pastors (over the last thirty years) from our church - people that are proven here, have grown up here, that love the people here, that love the direction here, that will give their lives for the sake of the people. They're the ones that you want to find and to look for. Could we have found smarter guys? Well, you could have replaced me fairly quickly, then. Unless you're in the place God wants you to be. We've been blessed to be able to hire from within, and I think certainly the best bet.....now I'll show you.....in all honesty, they moved Paul around, they moved Titus around, they moved Timothy around. There was, in the early church, a need to kind of establish. But Paul will say this, "Establish elders in every city" (Titus 1:5), and all of these churches had local church leadership. And so the apostles were able to say to the body, "Pick seven men from among you." In other words people you know, people you respect, that you know their walks with God; they didn't just come in here with a resume and a letter of recommendation, but they live the life. People know who they are. That was their first criterion. Ministry is always to be an overflow of a life that has been committed to the Lord. And who knows you better than the people that you watch week in and week out? So, ministry is always just an overflow from your walk with God. You can't just make it....."Hey, I want to get in ministry. I'll just all of a sudden get to be spiritual." Ministry is what I do because I walk with God, and then it comes out. I've sat at His feet. It's overflowing.

Secondly, they were told to pick "seven men." Now seven in a numerical sense is the number for perfection in the Bible or completeness. I don't know if that's the way that it is used here. But let's just say this - that was enough people to take care of the job. They thought seven people would do it; which, by the way, if you think about it, how many widows were being fed every day that you'd take, full time, seven guys to run around and deliver food? I mean, this must be a huge ministry in the church, early on.

Thirdly, they needed to have a "good reputation." In other words, they had to have the respect of the people that they were serving. A successful minister requires a life that is stable. It is hard to listen to people whose devotion to the Lord is inconsistent, or it's undependable, or they're never around, or they've got a lot of opinions, but they don't have any time. So, "Look for seven men among you that are godly," not someone who says, "Hey, I want to be an usher," and you say to them, "If you want to be an usher here, you're going to have to start goin' to church." That's backwards. Here's what you do. "You want to be an usher? Well, I see you here all the time. You'd make a great usher. I'm glad you're here." Right? In other words, you walk the walk before you get the position. It's the way it always works. It's an overflow or an outgrowth, if you will, of your walk with God.

And then they said, "You should find someone full of the Holy Spirit," someone who has a yielded life. And these are qualifications to wait on tables. You might have said, "Dude, you got a car? You have gas money? Do you know how to read a map? Because you're going to have to go all over the place to deliver food." None of that comes up. Known among the tribes, good reputation, filled with the Spirit. Now that's for delivering food. The key was to pick men qualified in their present walk with the Lord, and they were filled with "wisdom." Or, if you will, they showed an anointed common sense. And let's face it - not everybody has that. Some people are excited about the Lord, but they have no common sense at all.

So, "Pick those guys. Bring them to us. And we will commission them." Or, literally, "We will say in front of everyone publicly, 'They qualify. They represent us. They're the ones that we're going to depend upon to make sure that this ministry is accomplished.' " This is the extent of their work. And I want you to notice what it says here. It says, "We'll appoint them over this business." Now maybe that offends you, but it was a business work. It required checks and balances and delivery and times and schedules. It ran, in many ways, like a business would, and that's just the way, I think, sometimes ministry goes. This is an

important work, and it needed to be done. Business is important. It is spiritual. So, wouldn't you like, if you were one of these seven guys, to be picked by your peers? You know, they, "Hey, I'd like to suggest" and then your name. "Oh, they're godly. I love them. They're always around. They're servants. They're filled with the Spirit. They're faithfully serving." How many votes would you get? "Let's vote tonight for seven elders." Would you get on the list? Because people know you, and you're around, you're praying for them, and you're involved. Or.....nobody knows your name. It's a little different. So these guys were out there. They were serving. You can bet on that. And all of them were chosen because of their walks with the Lord.

Now, two of the men that are chosen - Philip and Stephen - God would raise up to far greater responsibility than they ever signed up for. They signed up for food delivery, but they would go far beyond that. They were faithful in the little, and they would be given much. I would just refer you to Jethro's advice to Moses back in Exodus 18. You might remember that Moses was up early and stayed up late just to help folks. And his father-in-law, who we're not sure he was even a believer at that time when he came to visit him, said, "What you're doing isn't very good. You're wearin' yourself out, the people are wearin' out waiting for you." And Moses said, "What am I supposed to do?" And he says, "Here's what you're supposed to do," and he gives him these criteria that are literally the same as you read here. "Find men amongst the tribes, faithful, filled with the Spirit. Give them the jobs to do so that the people don't have to come to you all the time. And if there's great responsibility, something comes up that they can't handle, they can talk to you. But just train others. Let them be a part." For a growth issue. Right? Two and a half million people in the wilderness, and there's Moses - holding court. If you go to Deuteronomy 1 (which is, kind of, Moses looking back over his life and saying to the people, "You remember when we did this? You remember when that happened?"), he reminds them of this good counsel he got from Jethro and said, "You remember when we were overwhelmed and the Lord said, 'Hey, find some guys'? And, man, that really worked out. That was the wisest thing that we could do." When you get to Numbers 11, and there're seventy men that are chosen because Moses needs help. "I'll take some of My Spirit that's in you and place it upon them." Moses goes over the exact same thing. "These are the qualifications, and these are the guys." So that qualification never stops, if you will. You find it throughout the Scriptures. So these are the qualifications (verse 3) for a deacon who takes care of the temporal needs of the body.

Meanwhile (notice in verse 4), the disciples would press on doing what they were given to do, which was teach the Bible. Here's the deal for a teaching pastor - you have to meet with God in private so that you can speak for Him in public. That's really your calling. I spend thirty hours a week studying. I don't do a lot of counseling like I used to, don't do a lot of traveling around. I cut back on my speaking thing just after I got sick last year. But the thing is I think my responsibility - the greatest one I have - is to just make sure that when I stand before you that I'm bringing God's Word to you; not my opinion, not readin' some guy's book, not passing along my political views. People always ask me, "Why don't you say stuff politically?" And I say, "Well, I do all the time. I'm for Jesus. I'm votin' for Him every time. That's all I know." (Laughing) Until He comes back, I think we're gonna mess it up.

So the pastor's job - Spurgeon used to say to his students (if you've ever read "Lectures To My Students"), "Your job as a pastor is to sit close to the fire until you catch fire, and then people will show up to watch you burn." And he meant that in a good way. Bring God's Word so that people will come. So, as pastors, especially in my position, I have to deliver God's Word, and to preach without praying is futile. I mean, if God's not in it, I'm cooked. Right?

So here're the disciples, and they avoid the temptation to do too much. And I don't mean they're lazy because this had to be a people sometimes say to me, "You preach every Sunday? Yeah, what do you do the rest of the week?" "Yeah, there's nothin' really to do. I play golf pretty much. That's it." (Laughing) It is easy to become sidetracked. It is easy to be stretched too wide. It is easy to get too shallow. I think the congregational expectation of pastors, by and large, is unrealistic. They can't go to everything. People say to me, "How come you didn't show up at the married couples?" "I don't know. I gotta teach three services the next morning." "Yeah, dude, we were there. You can be there." "Yeah, I'd just as soon get ready for tomorrow." "Well, if that's the way you want to be." (Laughing) I guess that's the way I want to be. I don't know.

So, I think Van Cleaf (he wrote a book on the Person of the Holy Spirit years ago) - but I remember a quote. He said, "If you teach a hundred people for one hour, and you're not prepared, you've wasted a hundred hours of God's time." So, teaching is work. I find it to be extremely difficult. I've been doing it a long time. I have notes in my office - probably 12,000 of them - on every verse in the Bible. I could phone it in. I could just go pull it out, come out here and read it to you. You

probably wouldn't know the difference. But I'd know the difference. Because I don't know what God wants to tell us this week, so I've got to stay plugged in with Him, I've got to hear from Him. And I take it very seriously. I'm a goof-up in everything I do. I'm the most sarcastic, wayward person that I know.....until I stand up here. And then I have this plaque right here, and it says, "Sir, we would see Jesus." Because that's all that matters. You've got to come and see Him.

So I think the apostles picked the right direction. "Let's stay with learning God's Word and getting to know Him." And as growth comes and the needs come with it, look, I know plenty of pastors that have left the teaching of God's Word to wait tables. They've involved themselves in a hundred things - nothing having to do with teaching the people God's Word. I'm personally convinced that's my job. I don't go away very often. I could be gone for a year going to the mission field, the way we get these cool invitations. I just got an invitation to go to Thailand. But I think I'm just going to stay because this is what we're supposed to be doing. Right? Unless God calls me to Hawaii, then I'm outta here. I don't care what you guys think. (Laughing) Just playing. Just playing.

All right. So that's the decision of the disciples. Right? The disciples said, "We're going to stay here and do what God's given us to do. You pick guys that qualify for taking care of the needs, and all of it will be taken care of."

Verse 5, "And the saying pleased the whole multitude." I should say to you, you should underline that because that very rarely happens - making everyone happy by the decision you make. "And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch." There is further wisdom to be found in the fact, like I said, these are all Hellenist names. And the last guy, Nicolas, was a Gentile. He was a proselyte. It means he converted from being a Gentile (a believer in a multiplicity of gods) to Judaism (he believed in one God), and now he'd become a believer in Jesus Christ. And he came from Antioch which just happens (if you can keep that in mind) to be a place that will soon see a tremendous revival. I don't know if he was going to be a part of it. He went back home. We're not told. We do know that Stephen was the first martyr in the early church. Philip was really presented to us as the first evangelist in the early church, in terms of ministry. The other five names on this list we know nothing about. I can't tell you what happened to them after we just read their names, and the reason is I think the principle is God usually does most of His work through people that are relatively unknown. They're

faithful in His eyes. Everybody knows Billy Graham and a couple of other people. But you don't know, and I suspect I don't know at all, the people that do the most work in the church, and they're just folks that we don't even know their name. They're so faithful and so willing to serve.

So, with great wisdom the disciples appoint those who see the need. They set the spiritual criteria for their involvement. And out of this humble beginning, a couple of them - Stephen and Philip - go on to greater prominence. Most of them do not. But if you want God to use you at all, you've got to start somewhere being available to serve. So these guys would pay a great price. I'm always interested in seeing people who want a position in the church, but they're not willing to pay a price. They serve selfishly, they come when it's convenient, they don't want to put themselves out. They don't really love the church. At least you can't see that they do. They're easily offended, and they leave quickly. They love themselves more than the people around them. They don't care about their example. But there're a lot of folks like that. And then there're guys like this who just take it seriously and watch God use them. Who does God use? Faithful people who handle their responsibility and their authority with grace.

So verse 6 tells us that the apostles, once these men had been brought to them and chosen, "set them before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them." They handed the authority to them, and they sent them out to do the work. So the problem was solved, so to speak. Right? And I would say to you it's a good order to follow. Pray before you lay your hands too quickly on anyone. Promotion is easy. Most people like to be promoted. It is awfully difficult to reel them back in if you think you've made a mistake. "I'll make you in charge. I don't like what you're doing. You're no longer in charge." That usually aggravates most people. So, God, who would You like to pick? You might remember that the people picked King Saul because he looked like a king. He was tall and handsome. He just looked "kingly." And he turned out to be a real problem. The apostles identified and selected men who had spiritual qualifications and then publicly gave them their full support.

We have had people come here and serve here and then come to my office and say, "I believe I'm supposed to be a pastor, and you should hire me." They are no longer with us because I don't see that ever happening anywhere, where you candidate for a job, and you start puttin' pressure on whoever it is that's supposed to hire you. Everyone we've hired, we've seen God's hand upon. The Lord provided financially

for us to do so. There was a need for their gifts. And they came with great joy. They haven't all stayed that way as the Lord moves people around. But that's where we look to see what God is doing. So wait upon Him.

I love verse 7. We'll end with that tonight. It says this, "Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith." In other words, the results of organization were astounding. Right? And now we get to this wonderful word "multiplied." I don't know how many people you've had a chance to lead to the Lord in the last eighteen months. But if you could say, "Well, it used to be a couple, but man, it's been multiplying," that's a good word, isn't it? The word "multiply" is a good word. Satan's plan to divide and hamper the work from within was thwarted by wise delegation, by the leadership's willingness to adapt, by their desire to pray, by the looking for the potential of those that God had serving. They were prepared before they were chosen. God had prepared them. And the cries of jealousy and favoritism and side-taking, which could divide, hadn't and couldn't really have its work. It didn't result in that at all. The change was good, but there needed to be change. And I love verse 7 because now it said even the religious folks started to be touched, "many of the priests." I think we've mentioned to you before, but on Good Friday when Jesus died, it said that the veil in the Temple was torn from top to bottom. It signified the Lord saying, "Come on in." He didn't open it from the bottom. He opened it from the top. At least in the Temple in Jerusalem, as it stood in Jesus' day, that curtain was 60' wide and 30' long and 18" thick. It took a hundred priests to hang it. Everything they did was oversight. They supersized even the Temple. If it's big, it's good; really big is better. It's more spiritual. So, for that thing to tear, these priests that were serving that day - and I think all of them would have been on station during the time of the Passover - it must have left quite an impression on them. And now they watch as the Word of God is going out, and the saints were changing. It's an amazing picture. And God is doing that work. And that's the work, certainly, we pray for as well. We want to be flexible and spiritual and prayerful and dependent upon the Holy Spirit so that this can be written on your life and mine, that the Word of God spread. Isn't that what you want in your life, the Word of God spreading? And verse 7, by the way, is one of those summary verses. And if you've been reading along in the book of Acts, you'll find Luke (with great regularity) stops and goes, "Let me just give you a report from the field." And there'll be one or two verses just telling you how many people got saved and what's been goin' on and what's been happenin', and then he'll go back to the story. Well this is certainly one of those.

Next week, beginning in verse 8 (and we'll finish the rest of the chapter next week), we're going to go with Stephen and watch how the Lord brings him to a place of greater service. In fact, he's going to end up at a place called the Synagogue of the Freedmen. It was a synagogue in Jerusalem inhabited by Hellenists. This is where the Hellenists met. This is the language that he understood. This is the culture that he was comfortable with. This is the food (after the service) that he was used to eating. And it was those very Hellenists, though not believers (but he was), that the Lord sent him to, to begin to dispute the Scriptures and to challenge their lack of faith in Christ. And it was that conflict with the Hellenists - his own people - that would eventually have him arrested in Jerusalem, give him the opportunity to preach one sermon (chapter 7) and then be murdered - become the first martyr. So, faithful in the little, God'll give you much. If you don't want quite that much, just tell the Lord before you start, "I don't want to end up dead." But he was a faithful man. So next week we're going to look at verses 8 through 15. If you'll just kind of study ahead, ask the Lord to speak to you, I know that He will.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
January 19, 2018