

The Ever Present Need

Acts 6:1-7

Years ago the words were penned that *success is "last-year's nest from which the birds have flown."*¹ Rather you are speaking of your personal life, your spiritual walk, secular business or of ministry, the fact remains you cannot stay stagnant and expect to see continued growth as you have in the past.

In the early chapters of the book of Acts, we find that God was continually adding to the New Testament Church. Even when persecution was present, the Church still enjoyed great favor among the general public and for the most part remained free to proclaim the Gospel and expand the work of the ministry. And the ministry did expand!

As we saw at the end of chapter 2 and the end of chapter 4, as the Church grew, the added growth of the Church brought about a necessity to **minister to both the spiritual and the physical needs** of the growing congregation.

Back in Acts 2:44-47 we read

⁴⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. ⁴⁶ So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

As the Church grew, there were needs which were made apparent and the growing Body of Believers joined together in meeting those needs, *and the Lord continued to add to the church daily those who were being saved.*

Then, in Acts 4, beginning in verse 32 and going through 35 we see the same pattern continuing –

³² Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ³³ And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 429.

them all. ³⁴ Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵ and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

The Church was rapidly growing and the number of people who were a part of the Church went through the normal processes of life. And with that there arose needs among the congregation that were very apparent, so the congregation itself took up the cause and sacrificed of their own resources in order to assist Brothers and Sisters who were struggling.

You need to understand this **wasn't Socialism** where **everyone is forced to contribute** from his or her resources into a common pool. What we see here were **multiples of individual acts of love and compassion** for the needs they saw around them. And as these resources came into the Church, they were *laid at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.*

You now had the twelve Apostles, with Matthias being added to take the place of Judas Iscariot. And it's very evident here from the Scriptures we just read that the primary responsibility for the disbursement of these physical resources was placed on the Apostles.

So, it shouldn't come as a surprise when we find that very soon:

- That which seemed to make sense at the beginning was no longer working out so well.
- What worked in the early stages, was no longer going to work as the church grew.
- What was sufficient in *the days of small things*, was no longer sufficient in the days *when the number of the disciples was multiplying*.

As a matter of fact, we are going to see this morning that the Apostles were actually messing up in some of the areas of personal care for the congregation.

Look with me at Acts 6, as we continue our journey through “*Acts: the Birth and Growth of the First Century Church*” – or maybe it should be called “*Acts: the Trials and Errors of the First Century Church*”. Well, we will see this morning.

Please look with me at Acts chapter 6, beginning in verse 1.

Acts 6

*¹ 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. ² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 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; ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."*

We know that in the early days of the Church, those that were coming to faith in Christ were coming out of Judaism. These former Jews were coming to realize that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the Promised One of Israel, the Messiah. But, even within Judaism there were divisions of backgrounds and even cultures.

What we find in this passage is actually a division of the two basic or primary groups: those who considered themselves **pure to both the language and culture of the Jew** – calling themselves Hebrews; and those whose had been **impacted and influenced by the surrounding Greco-Roman language and culture** - this group were called the Hellenists.

The word Hellenist actually comes from the Greek word *Hellēnistēs*, "one who uses the Greek language" and *Hellás*, meaning "Greece".

The Greek or Hellenistic influence and culture had started being a part of the land of Israel since the time of the Seleucid Empire as they took control over the area around 199 B.C. This Empire was based in Macedonia, in northern Greece. The Grecian influence continued strong in the area even as other powers and empires strived for control.

Once the Romans gained control around 63 B.C. they actually allowed the Greek culture and influence to remain and simply adopted or adapted most of its culture as their own. What is known as the Greco-Roman culture.

During the early days of the Church there appears to have been a bit of a battle of prejudice among those who considered themselves pure to Judaism and those who had been influenced by the Grecian culture. The difference between the two groups was very apparent in the languages they commonly spoke, their clothing, and their politics.

Even after becoming converted to Christianity, these differences came through. The Body of Christ was then, and still even today, is a very diverse community united by faith in Jesus Christ.

With several thousands now identifying themselves as Believers and as a part of the Church, it would have been **logistically impossible for the Apostles themselves to have absolute control** over the disbursement of the resources to all those in need. And apparently from what we read here in verse 1, some who were hands on in assisting in the disbursement were favoring the Hebrew widows over those who were Hellenists.

A complaint about the discrepancy reached the ears of the Apostles and they took direct action to bring the problem to a quick end.

² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables."

How many were in the multitude, we don't know, but apparently there were at least those who were involved in the issue. The Apostles clearly understood that these were issues that needed to be dealt with among the Body of Believers, but they also knew that they had a great responsibility before God and the people.

I believe the Apostles also knew how easy it would have been for them to simply take care of the job themselves, and in **doing something that was actually good and needing to be done, they would miss the need to fulfill their own responsibilities.**

We need to quickly understand, they weren't saying that serving the people was below them. They weren't saying that they couldn't or would never **"lower themselves"** to wait on tables. They were simply stating that God had given them a particular responsibility and if they fail in that responsibility, the impact and effect of that failure would be felt by the Church at large and even the influence of Christianity on the world surrounding them. **It was a matter of priorities.**

D.L. Moody used to say that it was better to put ten men to work than to try to do the work of ten men. If the Apostles were to fulfill their primary responsibilities, there would need to be others who took care of these issues. So the apostles continued...

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; ⁴ but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."*

One of the first things you realize is the requirements the Apostles looked for in these men who would be in charge of the disbursements: *men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.*

You need to understand the idea of *good reputation* wasn't just their reputation within the Church either.

- What did the outside world think of these men?
- Did they see them as men of honesty and integrity?
- Could they be trusted with the resources of the Church, to fulfill their responsibilities in a fair and equitable way?

Anyone who stands before the body of Christ and represents the Body of Christ either within the church herself or to the outside world needs to be the kind of individual where there can be no charge placed against them that would stick. Very much along the line of the words of Peter –

1 Peter 2

¹² *Have your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

Full of the Holy Spirit speaks to us about the **spiritual maturity** of the individuals:

- Are they filled with and walking in the fullness of the Holy Spirit?
- Are they led by the Spirit or by the flesh?

You don't want to have someone who is **led by logic or the world's ways to be placed in an area of responsibility within the Body of Christ.**

An individual may be great in the world of business, but when it comes to the Church's business he or she needs to be led by the Spirit of God.

They may be savvy to Wall Street and Madison Ave., but if they are not walking in the Holy Spirit none of their worldly wisdom will be of any true and lasting, eternal benefit to the Bride of Christ.

Being *full of or filled with the Holy Spirit*, is a non-negotiable necessity in carrying out the ministry for the Body.

And wisdom. One would think that if an individual was *full of or filled with the Holy Spirit* they would also be *full of or filled with wisdom*. But, I feel that the gift of wisdom is a particular blessing placed on those who would be given tasks requiring responsibility. This "**wisdom**," was the ability and the readiness to apply the Word of God and the movement of the Spirit to the practical affairs of life.

But, even *seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom*, wouldn't be enough to take care of all the needs of the Church. You notice, they were to be *appointed over this business*. They would be the responsible parties, the managers or directors over these issues. These seven men would be placed in those areas of responsibility in order that the Apostles might once again and more completely *give themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word*.

It was sometime last year when I had asked Brother Vic Sanders to put out an email to the men who are a part of our Tuesday morning study. The individual who normally cut the area of grass out back wasn't available and the grass needed cutting, we simply asked if any of the men would be available to cut the grass. One of the responses came back from an individual who was actually no longer attending here. His response was, "*Why doesn't Pastor David or Pastor Robert cut the grass?*"

It would have been so easy to get angry over that response, but suddenly the Spirit brought to my mind two things: 1) He has no idea of the amount of projects and physical care Pastor Robert, me and our other staff does around here; but more importantly, 2) he has no idea of what the idea is behind this passage in Acts 6.

As Pastors, can we and are we able to care for **all** the physical needs within this Body? Well, we could try, but there is no way we could cover them all. And as we tried to care for all these physical issues, we would definitely miss some of you. But even more important than that: the Spiritual issues and neetheir the Body would have to be placed on a back burner.

We are so blessed to have so many within this Fellowship who care about this Body and God's Kingdom work being done in and through this church. I'm not going to name names, because I would forget someone, but we have folks who are either part-time paid or they volunteer weekly or monthly on a regular basis to allow the work of the ministry to continue on unhindered.

- We actually do have those who cut the grass,
- Sweep and hose off the parking lot
- Trim the trees
- Visit the homebound
- Minister to those in the convalescent home
- Work with our Teens
- Help feed the Homeless
- Care for and organize the Nursery
- Teach our Sunday School classes
- Prayer and in counseling
- Serve as Ushers and Greeters
- Repair and maintain the buildings
- Lead/assist in worship ministries
- Run sound and change the slides
- Organize Children's ministry & VBS
- Run and care for the office necessities
- And so many more areas ...

This past Friday night and Saturday morning we joined with a few other Calvarys to hold a Servants Appreciation Conference up in Queen Creek. It was an opportunity to acknowledge and honor those who 1) allow us as pastors to do the work of ministry we are called to fulfill and 2) to acknowledge and honor those who willingly and faithfully serve the Lord Jesus by serving the Church Body.

I can tell you right now that among the 200 or so in attendance, we had a couple of dozen individuals go to the conference from our Church. But, that was no where near

the number of individuals who faithfully give of their time and talents to serve this Body of Believers known as Calvary Chapel of Casa Grande.

The Apostles had the people choose *seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom they could appoint over this business.*

Acts 6

⁵ *...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,* ⁶ *whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.*

Some have pointed out that the names of these men would draw you to conclude that they were very possible of the Hellenists themselves. But, It was not uncommon during this time frame for a Jew to have both a Hebrew name and a Greek name – even without being a Hellenist. Simply think of the Apostle Paul (a Greek name), whose Hebrew name was Saul, and he definitely was not a Hellenist.

As these men went about the work of organization and caring for the physical needs of the Church, there is no way just those seven could have done it all. There were others who were willing to serve and submit to their leadership in the ongoing work of ministry.

Just as we read in the book of Nehemiah, it would seem as though *the people had a mind to work.*

And that is what I see in this Body of Believers called Calvary Chapel of Casa Grande - those who serve in the vast variety of ministry opportunities are ***those who have a mind to work.*** They are serving the Lord Jesus, by serving His Bride, the Church.

The work of the ministry can not be effectively done by only a few. The Apostle Paul speaks about every part of the Body doing their function, working in their gifting for the common good of the whole Body.

A healthy Church is a Church where the Body of Believers themselves are actively involved in service - within the Church and within the Community as a strong representative of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the New Testament Church, as these physical tasks were being cared for by others, the Apostles could continue to devote themselves *continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.*

And because they had the opportunity to seek the Lord through prayer and His Word, God moved in a powerful way among them.

⁷ 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.

As I just shared, Paul speaks about the fact that as we are all a part of the same Body, the Body of Christ, the Holy Spirit has gifted us with differing gifts according to the measure of grace that is given to us... but we are all a part (Romans 12:6). But it is the one and the same Spirit that works all these things, distributing to each as He wills (1 Corinthians 12:11)... but we are all a part. For now indeed, there are many members, yet one Body (1 Cor. 12:20).

There are areas of service available. We don't want to plug holes, we want to have men, women and young people who are filled and led by the Holy Spirit of God who are willing to give of themselves and

- minister to our Children,
- to serve the homebound and the homeless,
- to sweep and hose off the parking lot,
- to trim the trees and care for the landscaping,
- to visit the homebound and hospitalized,
- to assist in the ministry to those in the convalescent home,
- to work with our Teens,
- to help feed the Homeless,

- to serve with those in the Nursery and our Sunday School classes,
- to be available as prayer counselors,
- to be faithful as Ushers and Greeters,
- to assist in the worship ministries,

But above all else, to use your talents and abilities to serve the Body of Christ here at Calvary CG and the Casa Grande Valley community with the love of Jesus Christ.

Let me close with this last thought and word of encouragement to you: if you don't think your place of service is important to the Body of Christ, think of the position of the garbage collector – how many of you know the name of your neighborhood trash collector?

Well then, he or she must not be very important then... or are they?

*The nastiest strike in New York City history happened in the cold of February, 1968. The Uniform Sanitationmen's Association ("USA") had been working for six months without a contract and USA leader John DeLury threatened a strike, but Mayor John Lindsay gave his okay for a **\$400 a year wage increase** (about 5%), better pensions and double-pay for Sunday. But the frustrated workers rejected the deal, demanding a \$600 raise, and struck on February 2.*

*With a city as big as New York City, you can well imagine how fast the trash accumulated. Just three days later on February 5, The New York Times wrote that the city looked like "a vast slum as mounds of refuse grew higher and strong winds whirled the filth through the streets." By that point there were about **30,000 tons of trash** on the streets. One news writer wrote of the Lower East Side, "Garbage was piled chest-high. Egg shells, coffee grounds, milk cartons, orange rinds, and empty beer cans littered the sidewalk."*

The strike finally ended 10 days after it started on February 12th with an estimated accumulation of 100,000 tons of trash piled along the streets of New York City.

Do you want to be a part? God has a way that you can join...

But first you need to know Him and the power of His grace and forgiveness...