

# Acts- Church Afire! “Stephen and the First Deacons,” Acts 6”

## Sermon Summary & 5-Day Devotional Mar 8<sup>th</sup>, 2026 By Rev. Paul Hudson

### Sermon Summary

Pastor Paul discusses the apostolic church's response to internal conflict. The early church was rapidly growing, so much so that cultural tensions emerged, specifically between Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews. These tensions threatened the unity and witness of the early Christian community. By appointing deacons, such as Stephen, to manage practical issues, the apostles ensured that the ministry of the Word and prayer remained central. This balance between spiritual leadership and practical service is essential for a healthy church body and reflects the roles that different members are called to play.

The role of deacons, as introduced in Acts 6, provides a model for addressing the church's needs both spiritually and practically. Stephen was selected not only to serve tables but also because he was full of faith and the Holy Spirit. His example demonstrates that practical service does not exclude one from spiritual influence. Instead, it enhances the church's ability to respond to challenges while continuing to spread the Gospel. This approach illustrates that each church member, regardless of task, can contribute spiritually and practically to the body of Christ.

From Gamaliel's counsel in Acts 5 to the church's handling of internal disputes in Acts 6, the theme of God's unstoppable work is evident. Despite opposition and cultural tensions, the church continued to grow as it adhered to the principle of aligning practical action with spiritual integrity. This lesson encourages modern believers to focus on unity and service, empowering leaders filled with the Spirit to effectively navigate challenges. By recognizing the role of every believer, the church can thrive, demonstrating that God's plan, begun through humble servitude, cannot be stymied by worldly opposition.

### Key Themes

#### 1. God's Work is Unstoppable

In Acts 5, the apostles faced imprisonment and threats but remained undeterred because they firmly believed in their mission's divine origin. This passage differs from mere human endeavor and echoes Gamaliel's wisdom: opposition cannot stop what God has started. This lesson reverberates through time, evidenced by the continued growth of Christianity. Despite challenges, the assurance that God's plans prevail provides profound comfort and encouragement to believers to stay steadfast in their faith.

#### 2. Balance in Church Leadership

Acts 6 introduces a problem involving the Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews, highlighting the church's need for effective leadership. The apostles' choice to appoint deacons reflects a balanced approach to addressing both spiritual and practical needs. By allowing deacons to handle everyday duties, the apostles focused on prayer and the Word, ensuring a healthy church dynamic. This model encourages communities today to recognize that equipping different members to address various needs strengthens overall church unity and effectiveness.

#### 3. Unity Overcomes Cultural Divides

The early church's resolution of the conflict between Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews demonstrates that unity is crucial for spiritual integrity. By appointing deacons who were full of wisdom and the Spirit, the church modeled inclusivity, countering cultural biases that could undermine their witness. This approach serves as a timeless lesson in emphasizing love and equity, reflecting Jesus' teachings. Encouraging unity across diversity is vital for today's church to embody the Gospel's message and reinforce its witness.

#### 4. Deacons: Spiritual and Practical

Stephen's life as a deacon challenges conventional perceptions of church roles. Though responsible for practical tasks, his life was marked by spiritual power and presence. This bridges the perceived gap between practical and spiritual service. It's a call to believers that no matter their role, there is potential for powerful spiritual impact. Their contributions extend beyond physical duties to become integral components of God's work, encouraging believers to recognize their spiritual call in all aspects of service.

#### 5. Empowering Spirit-Filled Leaders

The apostles wisely chose leaders from among the congregation to address the church's needs, valuing those full of the Spirit and wisdom. This decision empowered the church to tackle problems effectively, ensuring each role contributed to the mission. For modern churches, this highlights the importance of recognizing and empowering Spirit-filled leaders across various capacities. Emphasizing such leadership fosters a culture of empowerment, encouraging participation and allowing diverse talents to flourish for God's kingdom.

## 5-Day Devotional

Day 1 — God's plans cannot be stopped by human opposition.

Supporting Scripture: Acts 5:38-39

Gamaliel's advice to the Sanhedrin was profound: if the movement led by the apostles was from God, it would be unstoppable. This teaches us a foundational truth about God's sovereignty. When God initiates a work, no force, no opposition, no power on earth can halt it. We see this truth evidenced in the growth of Christianity throughout the centuries. Reflecting on this gives us confidence in God's ultimate plan for our lives and His church. Even when faced with challenges, we are called to trust in God's ability to accomplish His will. Remember, any opposition we face is ultimately against God Himself, and God always prevails.

*Reflection Question: What does Gamaliel's advice teach us about God's unstoppable power?*

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Day 2 — Equity within the church preserves its mission and testimony.

Supporting Scripture: Acts 6:1-6

The early church faced tension between Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews, revealing a potential cultural divide that threatened its unity. The apostles quickly addressed this by appointing deacons to ensure fair distribution of resources. This not only resolved the issue but set a precedent for inclusive leadership. In our communities, it's vital to strive for fairness and inclusiveness, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued. This prevents conflicts from escalating and maintains the church's credibility and mission. By prioritizing unity through equity, we reflect Christ's love more effectively to the world.

*Reflection Question: How can we ensure equity and inclusion in our own communities?*

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Day 3 — Both spiritual and practical services are essential in the church.

Supporting Scripture: Acts 6:4-7

The apostles' decision to focus on prayer and teaching, while appointing deacons for practical tasks, highlights a balanced approach to leadership. This division of responsibilities ensured that spiritual and practical needs were met, illustrating the importance of each role within the church. For us today, this means recognizing that spiritual leadership and practical service are complementary. Whether in church roles or personal life, this balance ensures that we are effective and holistic in ministering to others. It also prevents burnout by distributing tasks, allowing all members to contribute according to their gifts.

*\*\* This experimental document was generated by AI, fully based on the original sermon of the week. Edited and approved by Pastor Paul for accuracy.*

## 5-Day Devotional

*Reflection Question: How can spiritual leadership and practical service work together in your life?*

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**Day 4 — Integrity and faith are powerful testimonies in service.**

Supporting Scripture: Acts 6:8-10

Stephen's life demonstrates that strong faith and integrity can leave a remarkable impact. Appointed as a deacon, he was known for performing signs and wonders through the Holy Spirit's power. Despite opposition, Stephen's wisdom and integrity shone, making it impossible for others to refute him. His story encourages us to pursue a deep relationship with God, allowing His Spirit to guide our actions. A life marked by faith and integrity can influence others and demonstrate God's power, even in a practical service role. We are reminded that every believer, regardless of position, can be an impactful witness for Christ.

*Reflection Question: What can Stephen's life teach us about the power of faith and integrity?*

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**Day 5 — Every believer can cultivate spiritual influence.**

Supporting Scripture: Acts 6:15

Stephen's example as a deacon shows that every role in the church can be infused with spiritual depth. Though his position involved practical tasks, Stephen was full of faith, wisdom, and the Holy Spirit. His face, shining like an angel's, signified divine presence and peace even under persecution. This challenges us to seek spiritual growth and depth in whatever role we find ourselves. Whether in formal ministry or everyday tasks, inviting the Holy Spirit to work through us can lead to unexpected opportunities for influence and witness. Pursuing spiritual depth ensures our service reflects Christ's love and power.

*Reflection Question: How can you pursue spiritual depth in your current role or service?*