



2026 Weekly Devotions

Week of: January 19th - 26th

Sermon: January 18th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community • equipping believers • serving Jesus

January 19

Acts 6:1

This week's devotions will be dedicated to the study of one particular passage of Scripture. To be totally transparent with you, I'm not sure how much this text will factor into the sermon on Sunday as the message for this Lord's Day is topical in nature. In light of the occasion (the ordination of three new deacons), I am endeavoring to provide some encouragement and admonition to our new deacons and the congregation as we joyfully look forward to their ministry among the flock.

With this goal in mind, I thought it might be neat to take a week to study the passage that details for us the very beginning of the office of deacon within the local church. Acts 6 records the story of the new church's recognition of the need for a second group of faithful men who were called for the express purpose of assisting the apostles in leading and caring for the flock.

Today we must notice that deacons were called in light of physical needs. The early church truly exploded in growth. In fact, thousands of believers were added to this new body over the course of a few days. While this was a glorious occurrence, it also created some incredible challenges for the leaders of the flock. One of those challenges comes to the forefront in our text today as we read that some of the widows (the most needy and vulnerable members of the church) were neglected in the "daily distribution" (the church's ministry that provided them food each day).

What is most interesting for us to note today is that this complaint was considered valid by the church itself precisely because it was unavoidable. The burgeoning church was full of people with real, physical needs and as the church expanded, the capacity of the Apostles to meet all of these needs was severely limited.

The more that a church grows, the more assistance her leaders need in tending to the flock. This truth applies to us at Smyrna as well. We are so grateful for the many new faces, but we also must recognize that each person who comes through our doors and joins our fellowship brings challenges and has potential needs and this lends true significance to the act of ordaining new deacons. As we will see, as people multiply so do the servants who are called to care for them. Dear brother or sister, Sunday was another indicator of God's goodness to our body as we see that He has, yet again, seen fit to provide more servants to care for the flock.

January 20

Acts 6:2

So, yesterday we saw that there were real, physical needs amongst the flock and this provided no small stir within the burgeoning church. As we have seen, no one seems to have disputed the need, but the solution needed some careful consideration.

As the Apostles begin to wrap their collective minds around the challenge, they make a very interesting statement towards the end of verse 2 saying, “it is not right that we should give up preaching the Word of God to wait tables.” Some have interpreted this to mean that waiting tables was somehow beneath them, but this cannot be the right understanding of the text. The reason I say this is because they devoted their energy and leadership towards finding a solution!

The idea of waiting tables (a flowery statement that simply means caring for physical needs) was not beneath them, it was at odds with their larger calling. Stated differently, they simply did not have the time to devote to teaching and preaching the Word (the calling on their life and the gift that they had been given) AND serving to meet the physical needs of the flock. Far from being a statement of arrogance, this was a humble acknowledgement of finitude.

One of the larger lessons behind this story of the implementation of deacons is that God has not called on man, or even one group of men, to meet all of the needs of the flock. No mortal among us is “superman”, instead we need the gifts of others to serve the flock well. Accordingly, deacons were called of God to devote themselves to the “waiting of tables” so that pastors can largely devote themselves to the “ministry of the Word”.

At Smyrna, you see this play out in our ministry. Your deacons are walking with you (in Sunday school classes), willing and able to serve you as you need. They are concerned with those who have physical needs including meals, transportation, physical tasks around property and the like. These men are valuable, and necessary, for the well-being of the flock and the freedom of your pastors to busy themselves: preparing to preach and teach, visiting the flock to care for their souls, offering counseling and the like. When these two offices meet, the church realizes that the pastors can't, and shouldn't, do everything. They are led to see the beauty of the diversity of the gifts of God, and they are given another group of godly men to emulate and benefit from as they faithfully serve the physical needs of the congregation.

January 21

Acts 6:3

The Apostles acknowledged the need and, in verse 3, give specific directions as to who the Lord would appoint to step in and serve. Notice here that several qualifications are given. First, godly deacons are to be men of good repute. This means that they are to have good reputation amongst the flock and within the community. The reason for this is simple, if they are going to serve in the Lord's name and be trusted as representatives of Christ and the church, they must be trustworthy.

Second, deacons are to be "full of the Spirit". The Spirit of God is the one who provides discernment, joy, peace, patience, kindness and the like. All of these attributes are critical to a man when he leads in serving others in need. Sometimes service is not easy! In fact, there are times when the people who are involved are difficult or hurting and, therefore, kindness and gentleness are prerequisites for their good!

Third, these men need wisdom. Deacons need the Spirit when they are informed about situations that may or may not be needs. They need wisdom to know how to meet the need, whether the issue is a "need" and they need patience to deal with all of the surrounding issues and challenges that inevitably arise when real-life people come with challenging circumstances.

Notice in all of these things that the Apostles, under the inspiration of the Spirit, were very detailed in their description of who qualifies as a deacon. Nowhere do they list age, or duration of membership as a qualification! There is nothing necessarily "spiritual" about being older nor is it enough to simply come to church for a long enough time. These leaders were instructing the church that those who would be God-honoring deacons were to be those who were godly men.

Smyrna, I can say with full conviction that the men who are serving our church body today are godly men. They love the Lord and they love you! While they are not perfect, they are men of good reputation who are full of the Spirit, and it is a joy and honor to serve you alongside of them. I am so proud of their obvious concern for the things of God and humbled to think about partnering with them in the Gospel. Their diligence and faithfulness to their calling is nothing short of astounding and we are very blessed to be able to benefit from their consistent servant leadership.

January 22

Acts 6:4

Thus far we have seen that the Apostles were adamant that help was needed in order to adequately serve the body of Christ. While the leaders of the church did not deny the true, physical needs of the congregation, they made it clear that they were not interested in “serving tables” which, we noted, is a flowery way of describing the action of helping people with their daily requirements.

Now, there are at least two objections that are raised at this point. The first is that this response is heartless! How dare the Apostles state that serving tables was not on their list of priorities! If you are tempted to land in this camp remember that the disciples did not simply say they were uninterested or unwilling, instead they led the church through a process to identify and commission godly individuals for the task. What this means is that the existing leaders did care, they were simply unable to do more than they were currently doing!

This leads me to the second objection... some might be tempted to think that the Apostles were just lazy. If that is you, I would call your attention to a very important word in verse 4. The word is “devote”. The Apostles tell the church that they desire to “devote” themselves to the ministry of the Word of God. The term “devote” denotes a persistent adherence to a task. It communicates a passionate commitment to a laborious task. The Apostles were not trying to get out of work; they were attempting to free themselves from any constraint that would take them away from their work!

The description of their responsibility is interesting as well as the Apostles state that they desire to be devoted to “prayer and the ministry of the Word.” “Prayer” is clear enough, but what is the ministry of the Word? The answer is multi-faceted. Certainly, the ministry of the Word includes preaching and teaching, but it also includes counseling and visitation of the sick and the like. Pastors are not simply lecturers. They are called to lovingly lead their flock by persistent and consistent instruction and admonition in the Word of God. That includes Sunday morning and other gatherings, but it also includes daily conversations in the truth and specific moments of encouragement and the like.

This ministry of the Word is paramount and time consuming! The Apostles knew they needed time to prepare sermons; they needed time to meet with those in need, they needed freedom to visit those who were ill and they needed the ability to mingle at gatherings so they could discern what was going on and minister as the opportunity arose. All of this together helps us understand their plight. The issue was not that pastors were to be “above” serving tables, the issue is that pastors are called to serve in another capacity and it would be impossible to oversee both tasks effectively and fruitfully!

Some of you might have wondered why we have deacons and pastors. This is the reason! I thank God for our deacons. Specifically, I am thankful for the labor and attention they put into their God-given task of ministering to you in your time of need so that Pastor Robert and I can dedicate our time and energy to ministering to your soul. It is a marvelous partnership indeed!

January 23

Acts 6:5

Verse 5 might be the most surprising verse of the entire passage in my humble estimation. Some might expect the Apostles to see the need and simply identify men who are able to fill the role. Instead, the Apostles recognize the need, give instruction to the congregation regarding qualifications for the role and then commission the church body to identify and ratify deacons!

This is one of the first instances of what we affectionately call “congregationalism”. Congregationalism is defined as the form of church governance where the church collectively governs itself! Many denominations today do not function in this respect. In the name of expediency or simply out of fear, numerous churches have taken the decision making out of the hands of the people in the pew. While this might streamline efforts and adds a measure of control, it also eliminates numerous men and women who have also been indwelt by the Spirit and, therefore, called to contribute to their local congregation.

There is a doctrine that undergirds this particular verse, it is typically known as “the priesthood of the believer”. This is the conviction that all believers in Christ are indwelt by the Spirit which means that the very wisdom of God resides within each redeemed individual. The implication of this doctrine is simple... we believe that wisdom is best applied and discerned when we make decisions together.

Now I want you to notice that the priesthood of the believer did not preclude leadership from the Apostles. They gave a very clear message of direction regarding the qualifications of those who should be selected. Their voice was still important and, furthermore, they were the clear catalyst for the decision. The Apostles (pastors of the first church) were the ones who decided to take action and mapped out the course for the congregation. This was not a situation where “everyone did what was right in their own eyes”, instead this was a circumstance where godly men alerted a congregation of faithful disciples to a need and they worked, collectively, to alleviate the issue. Leadership is integral to the process and it remains necessary today!

There is one further point I would like to make and that is the implication of this doctrine. Churches function congregationally with the conviction that all BELIEVERS are indwelt by the Spirit. The assumption, therefore, in congregationalism is that all church members are believers. If the church is full of lost people, the result of congregationalism will be a disaster because the ones voting on the perceived will of God don't care what the will of God is in any circumstance! This means that it is imperative that we, at Smyrna, guard our membership. If we simply allow anyone to join, without explaining the Gospel and working to discern relative fruit of the Gospel, we will more than likely careen down a path of disfunction. This is why we are so intent on a process for membership. We want to do the best we can, before God, to clearly articulate what it means to be a member and to discern whether those who come forward for membership are believers. The fruit of that labor is realized when moments arise where we, as a church body, need to move on the Lord's leadership and direction!

January 24

Acts 6:6

Today's verse should sound a bit familiar to those who were with us on Sunday morning. While I don't know the particulars of the worship service that is described in verse 6, the very act of commissioning deacons by praying and laying hands on them in the presence of the congregation is exactly what we did on Sunday morning. Sometimes, it is neat to see the commonalities over the centuries between the early church and our church in the 2026.

There are two things I would like to point out today about this verse. First, notice the centrality of prayer. Why did they pray? For many reasons. They prayed because the people who had been commissioned as deacons were to be used of God within their congregation and, therefore, they would need the Lord's assistance! They prayed for the strength to serve in this capacity. They prayed for God to protect these men (and their families) from the advances of the enemy. They prayed for the congregation to lovingly accept the ministry that these men would offer. Deacons need our prayers! My assumption is that the prayers continued over the years, and I trust that our congregation lifts up our deacons as well as they seek to minister to the flock.

Second, I want you to notice the commonalities between this service and the ones that are described elsewhere in Acts. In chapter 13, we read of the Spirit's leadership in setting Paul and Barnabas aside for the work of missions. These men were called to go forth and spread the Gospel resulting in the formation of churches. It is clear that part of the process of their being sent out to ministry was a similar act of corporate prayer. The point is that deacons and church planting missionaries are treated the same way by the church which means there is obvious parallel in their calling. They were both called to ministry.

Your deacons are not organizers or simply "board members", they are ministers of the Gospel of Christ. Their ministry looks different than mine or Robert's but the fact that the Spirit would lead the church to set them aside and pray for them in the same manner as that of Paul and Barnabas proves that God esteems this calling highly... and so do we! We thank God for the ministry of the deacons, and we prayed for them, publicly, to demonstrate the appreciation and respect we have for their service. Smyrna folks, my prayer for you is that you would continue to honor and respect these men who have been set aside by the Lord, through His leadership in our corporate discernment, for the task of ministry.

January 25

Acts 6:7

The final verse records the “effect” of the cause. The Apostles realized that the church was too large, and too needy, to care for without assistance. In God’s grace, the Spirit led them to a solution which the church embraced and heeded. The church prayed and subsequently identified godly men who would serve as deacons and the result is recorded for us in verse 7.

Luke tells us that the response of the calling of deacons was that the Word of God increased and the number of disciples “multiplied greatly”. Let us consider these two assertions in order. First, the word of God increased. Why does this result from the calling of deacons? There may be many reasons, but the obvious explanation is rooted in the sentiments of the Apostles that began chapter 6. The Word of God increased because the Apostles were freed up to minister the Word which equipped the saints to take the Word to their community and the outcome was growth! When the pastors of the flock are given the time to dedicate themselves to the Word of God, the flock is blessed with the bread of heaven which makes them strong and mature and equips them to make disciples in their own spheres.

Second, the church multiplied in part because the deacons were able to help serve the people of the congregation! What took place in Acts 6 is simple in this regard... the deacons helped carry the load so that the church could care for more souls. There is a saturation point with every individual. At some point, the needs just become too much which means that a church “taps out” its capacity when the needs overwhelm the caretakers. When the deacons were called and stepped to the foreground to help serve the people, the church was put in a position to be able to grow... exponentially.

My prayer is that we would see Sunday as another example of God’s goodness in raising up godly men so that our church can increase its ability to care for those that God might send our way. I am overjoyed at the progress our deacons have made this year. I am thankful for their love of God and love of you, and I have full conviction that the three men we added to their number on Sunday morning will continue to strengthen our body so that we can help more people in the days ahead. Smyrna, our job is not done yet. There are still plenty of people who need to hear the Gospel, even in Dinwiddie and the surrounding areas! May we pray that God would continue to raise up laborers to send out into the field knowing that the harvest is plentiful and God is powerful!