

The Relentless Gospel: Gospel Growing Pains

Acts 6:1-7

Patrick Murphy

Reading: **Acts 6:7 “7 So the word of God spread, the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly in number, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith.”**

Introduction:

I didn't play any sports in Jr. High. I wasn't any good at baseball and soccer was no fun, so I didn't play anything. Then right before the start of my freshman year of High School I told my parents I wanted to play football. Fast forward three years later, at a family dinner, (Grandparents and aunt and uncle with cousins lived across the street) they shared with me their thoughts. They took bets on how long I would last until I would quit that freshman year.

When I started my family only had who I had been prior to signing up for football. When I was met with the adversity and challenges, I had a choice to make. Grow or flee. I grew...

This morning in Acts we look at the challenge the church faced as it grew.

As the gospel advances, God develop and deploys servant leaders to meet the church's growing needs.

As the gospel advances (In our community and in our own walk), God develops and deploys servant leaders to meet the church's growing needs.

Prayer.

Fascinating
Lords Work
Interesting

A Growing Church is a Needy Church.

Acts 6:1 “In those days, as the disciples were increasing in number, there arose a complaint by the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution.”

In the days of preaching and proclaiming the Gospel, many people came to faith. Devoting themselves to the Apostle's teaching, prayer, the breaking of bread, and fellowship, but in the esteemed church's glamor, challenges began to appear. It started with a complaint across cultural lines. **The Gospel's first challenge was escaping religious opposition, and its second challenge was unifying different people.**

The church overlooked Hellenistic widows or Greek-speaking widows. Their welfare was somehow falling through the cracks in daily distributions of food and money. God consistently directs his people to offer special provision and protection for widows, along with orphans and exiles. An expectation Jesus reinforces in his teaching. So, in the commotion of growth and persecution, the church neglected a group of widows, but sadly not all widows—just a particular group.

As different cultures came to faith within the fledgling church, potential lines of division crept up. The first being the language barrier. The Greek-speaking Jewish widows and the Aramaic-speaking Jewish widows were receiving different treatment. So, the Greeks complained to the Apostles.

Why did it happen? Was there something nefarious going on or a bonified condescension for diaspora Jews who now believe? Luke does not indicate that inequality was intended. **Instead, Luke's simple account points toward unaddressed favoritism and familiarity as the cause of the crisis. They had a language barrier problem.** The new apostolic administration hadn't encountered this yet, and it created a challenge for the church to carry out its mission. If not addressed, the opportunity was certainly there for a more profound church division to metastasize.

It doesn't take much to create inequality within the family of God. All it takes is a little miss understanding. **ILL. In my last church, I was preaching, and a lady approached me after the services concluded, and I could tell I had done something. So, I put on a smile, saying to myself, "here we go."** She started with some pleasantries, "I like the sermon and enjoy when your preaching but you never look back to where I sit. You are always looking at your wife and were

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Acts 6:1-7

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all the pretty people sit." She was right. I genuinely enjoy looking at my wife, but I look at people who are looking at me.

Over the past year, there has been inequality within our church. Some have felt it more than others. It's the inequality of fellowship and care. Our brothers and sisters at home are watching online, unable to experience the same effect as we do gathered together. (Look at the camera) You are yearning to be here and, at times, have felt missed and overlooked. Out of site out of mind. Like the widows in acts, some have spoken up to make us aware specificity of your need. **The crisis of the pandemic created pressure upon this church, and it is causing us to grow. Not numerically but in ministry and focus.** We didn't have a ministry to call and check in on people at the pandemic's begging, but we have it now.

But are all needs equal? Is every need worthy of the church's time, talents, and resources? ... No, if meeting the need causes us to drift from our God-given mission, we have to learn to say, "no." The hardest thing to learn in ministry is saying "no" to good things. If a need does not help us "gather disciples to worship in Spirit and Truth, who grow in the Grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ and who go into the world proclaiming the gospel," we need to say no. Our mission is a big umbrella, and a lot fits underneath it. What if the need does help us fulfill our mission, but we cannot raise up a leader to meet that need? What do we do? We might need to say, "no."

The 12 recognized the importance of the need and recruited from the church to meet it.

How do we meet the needs that crisis creates? We develop servant leaders.

A Growing Church Develops Servant Leaders.

Acts 6:2-4 “²The Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, “It would not be right for us to give up preaching the word of God to wait on tables. ³Brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

The Apostles gather the church, and for the first time in Acts, Luke calls everyone disciples. Look at the text, the 12 are not too busy to address the problem at hand, but they are not the ones to fix it either. They make a stark comparison; “we preach the word but waiting on tables is not for us.” I hope you begin to question the actions of the church leaders here. While trying to solve an inequality issue, are they inadvertently creating another one? Are the Apostles admitting their superiority and the widow’s inferiority? ... No, quite the opposite, they are acknowledging their own limitations.

The 12 have a clear calling from the Lord to lead the church in preaching and prayer. So did they stroke their long beards “Fascinating, that is a really interesting problem?” We know the task of caring for the widows is not beneath them; otherwise, they would not have called an all-church meeting. Yet, there is a dilemma that needs addressing. On the one hand, caring for the poor and destitute cannot negate the preaching of the word, and on the other hand, we can't preach the word and not practice it. Their solution is simple, deploy more leaders. The Apostles know their time and energy are a limited resource that is best devoted to their calling. With all the people getting saved, there must be people within the church called to meet the church's needs. Successful church ministry is a team effort. Our church, like theirs, depends on servant leaders.

How do we deploy leaders to meet needs? We start with qualifications. Each ministry has its specific list of capabilities, but we follow the outline in these verses as a baseline.

Qualification for a servant leader

- **Spirit-Filled – Disciples of Jesus with the fruit of the Spirit evident in their life.**
- **Good Reputation – Living above reproach, the people they serve, know and approve of them.**
- **Wise – Spiritual wisdom aligning with the ministry needs.** i.e., administration and use of money.

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Acts 6:1-7

Patrick Murphy

Philosophy for developing servant leaders

- **Recruit – Calling believers to use their gifting to build up the body as servant leaders.**
- **Train – Equipping servant leaders with the appropriate skills and knowledge to lead well.**
- **Deploy – Empowering leaders with authority to fulfill their calling.**

The time to develop into a leader depends on the calling, the opportunity, or the need's requirements. The key is time. We must be willing to learn and grow into servant leaders. **Exceptional service takes time and humility.** We want more servant leaders to meet the needs of our church. Community group leaders, willing to open up their home and study the scriptures with others. Class leaders who desire to aid in specific areas of personal growth. Ushers and greeters who welcome and connect people in worship. Is the Lord calling you to servant leadership? I know many of you hear feel the Lord's draw to involve yourself to serve God in ministry.

TS:

A Growing Church Deploys Servant Leaders

Acts 6:5-7 “**5 This proposal pleased the whole company. So they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a convert from Antioch. 6 They had them stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.**

The church was excited to be a part of the solution. The Apostle's called the church to action, and the church responded by selecting seven men. Each of the men's names hints at their Greek background. Who better to minister to Greek-speaking widows than fellow Greek speakers who know their need. These men had a good reputation, were filled with the Spirit, and were wise concerning the need. So, the Apostle's entrusted the ministry to them, giving them authority to ensure they fulfill the responsibility. The apostles gave ministry away. A model the church continues to dispense.

Paul writes to the Ephesians explaining the interworking of Church leadership to ensure the church body's unity. He says in **Eph. 4:11-13**, “**11 And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness.**” God has called pastors and elders to equip the greater body of believers to carry out the ministry by using their gifts.

What is a servant leader? **A servant leader is anyone using their Spirit given gift to mature the church into Christ's likeness.**

He says to the church again in **1 Cor. 12:4-7**, “**4 Now there are different gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 There are different ministries, but the same Lord. 6 And there are different activities, but the same God works all of them in each person. 7 A manifestation of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good:**” Each of you is a gift to the church! Each of you who knows Christ has a gift to steward well. Many of you are already servant leaders actively gifting yourself to the church, and others here have the full potential of servant leadership waiting to be unleashed.

How do you come to know our gifts?

- **Know yourself**

Romans 12:3, “³ For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one.” What are your strengths? Can they be used to help and assist others in the church? What do you enjoy doing?

Lords work of Announcements

- **Listen to the Spirit**

1 Cor. 12:11, “¹¹ One and the same Spirit is active in all these, distributing to each person as he wills.” What has the Holy Spirit been drawing you to? Could it be a non-native ability, and the Lord keep put an area of service on your mind?

- **Involvement in the life of the church**

You don't need to know your gift before you serve. The early church discovered their gifts by serving. When they received joy in their service, they knew their gift. Taking a spiritual gifts test inventory is helpful but not final. The people who lead and know you can already identify where you can serve.

We know that the Apostle's decision to delegate responsibility was right by reading verse 7 “⁷ So the word of God spread, the disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly in number, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith.” The preaching had to continue, and the body needed caring for

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Acts 6:1-7

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Application

1. **Know our mission.** I hope everyone can commit the mission of CCC to memory. With so many opportunities to divide and fractionalize over a misunderstanding and unintended wrongdoing, our mission can help us remember we are all growing in Christ. Each of us is at a different spot on the hike, yet we are bound together as one body.

The mission of Christ Community Church is to make disciples of Jesus who gather to worship in Spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23), who grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Pet. 3:18), and who go into the world proclaiming the Gospel (Mt. 28:19-20).

2. **Communicate needs and stick around to meet them.** The Greek-speaking community communicated a missed need, and they stuck around to be a part of the solution. If the Lord has made you aware of a need in the church, it is a reasonable probability you are a part of the solution. Please don't communicate needs assuming it is someone else's responsibility to solve it. You might be wrongly assuming that your joy in the Lord is not there either.
3. **Answer the call to serve** I am not burdened by the thought of asking people to serve anymore. Within the excellent stewardship of our gifts is our joy in church and closeness with the Lord. If you are busy, unsure of your abilities, or burnt out in some capacity, the call of the Spirit to serve is always upon us. There are answers and ways to move past those obstacles. Come to servant leaders info night.
4. **Answer the call to equip** To those already serving; we need a perspective like the Apostles. Commitment to continue in our calling while giving ministry away to others so the church can grow. Who is your replacement?
5. **Have a heart of reconciliation.** As the church grew and internal problems came to the surface, the offended were willing to reconcile, and the offenders were humble, able to recognize the

Transition into Communion – In 1 Cor. 11 Paul addresses the church and scolds them for taking communion wrongly. It became a drunken dinner party based on his description, but the most glaring accusation was the inequality the church had accepted. The poor, who could not bring any food to the dinner, were being excluded from fellowship and communion. This is why he compels us to reconcile with our brothers and sisters before we

The Relentless Gospel: Gospel Growing Pains

Acts 6:1-7

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eat the bread and take the cup. Before we take communion first reconcile with God seeking his forgiveness for sins committed. Second, reconcile with your church family if a wrong has happened. Send a text, step out and call, or abstain from taking communion for this time. Reconciliation is uncomfortable at first and bless when completed. It is a growing pain, then we grow out of it.

Pray

1 Cor. 11:23-26 “On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, broke it, and said, ^[f] “This is my body, which is ^[g] for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Pray