

# WE ARE SENT

LESSONS FOR TODAY FROM THE EARLY CHURCH

## Growth Group Curriculum Week 2 – September 19, 2021 – Acts 6:1-7

**Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at church. Thank you for loving and caring for each other.**

The situation described in Acts 6 probably takes place around five years or so after Pentecost. The church was continuing to grow and at this point consisted almost completely of Jewish believers. Yet with growth, came problems. The Greek speaking believers were complaining that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food while the Jewish/Aramaic speaking widows were receiving their portion.

It is interesting to note that early in the church there were issues of equity and fairness that were based on language and culture. This neglect does not seem to be intentional, but more an issue of not having the proper administrative plan set up to deal with the widows who needed help. Yet, it came at an inopportune time. More and more people were coming to faith, and now the apostles were being distracted by this issue.

The apostles gathered the believers and reminded them that the apostles calling was basically to preach and to pray and that the faith community needed to choose seven faithful and wise men who could run the food distribution program. The believers agreed and selected seven men to help serve the tables. Scholars note that all seven men had Greek names and were more than likely inclined to make sure that everyone received their fair portion. It is interesting to note that the apostles while having the initial idea of getting additional help, trusted the congregation to make it all happen.

People often think that this story is where the notion of deacons comes from, but the word deacon is never used. The Greek word *diakonia* - which refers to "ministry or service"- is used in verse 2 to apply to the ministry of the daily distribution, as well as in verse 4 to apply to the ministry of the word. The word deacon is derived from the word *diakonia*, but the word deacon is actually never used in Acts.

The book of Acts makes it clear that some people have the gift of serving the Lord by serving tables and some have the gift of serving the Lord by proclaiming his word, and both are equally important. The end result of what happens in Acts 6 is that the apostles are freed up to begin preaching and teaching again and the widows are cared for because people are sharing in the ministry. It is also interesting to note in verse 7 that it was not just Jewish lay people who were coming to faith, but also Jewish priests.



## Exploring the Text

Acts 6:1-7

<sup>1</sup>In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. <sup>2</sup>So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. <sup>3</sup>Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them <sup>4</sup>and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

<sup>5</sup>This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. <sup>6</sup>They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

<sup>7</sup>So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

### Questions

*If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.*

- 1) Talk about a time when you tried to accomplish a project all by yourself and you didn't ask for any help. How did it go? What did you learn?
- 2) Does it surprise you that the newly formed church/fellowship of believers had problems from the very beginning?
- 3) We are probably not overly surprised that people were coming to faith in Jesus, but does it surprise you that Jewish priests (verse 7) were coming to faith in Jesus? Why do you think this was happening?
- 4) What can the modern church learn from how the apostles handled the disputes/conflicts that were happening in the early church?
- 5) Why do you think it was important for those “waiting on tables” to be wise and spiritual?
- 6) Stephen was described as a person “full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (verse 3 and 6). What makes someone full of the Holy Spirit? (see Ephesians 5:15-20 for a hint)
- 7) Near the end of his sermon, Pastor Paul used a quote from David Brooks about focus and distractions. *“If you want to win the war for attention, don't try to say “no” to the trivial distractions you find on the information smorgasbord; try to say “yes” to the subject that arouses a terrifying longing, and let the terrifying longing crowd out everything else.”* What do you think about this quote as it relates to keeping the distractions at bay as we try to keep our focus on Jesus?
- 8) The Bible makes it clear that a follower of Jesus is to serve others. Jesus said I did not come to be served, but to serve others. Why is it important for us to learn how to serve others? Is there some act of service you could do this week for others?

