



New Vision
A Place for You- Serving
Acts 6:1-7; Acts 6:8-15; Acts 8:1-8
8-19-18

Main Point

God raises up servant leaders in the church to meet the needs of the congregation and to ensure the church can stay on mission and we are called to have our “Yes” on the table.

Introduction

One of our measures at New Vision is if our “Yes” is on the table. This statement means if we are willing to do whatever it takes, at any time, at any cost, to see the gospel to be shared. One of the ways this can happen is when we serve one another.

Describe a time when someone served you by meeting a need in your life. Did you ask for help or did the person anticipate your need? How was your relationship with that person impacted by his/her act of service?

If someone was watching your day-to-day life, what would they say you consider a more important aspect of being a Christian—declaring the gospel or demonstrating it? Why are both important?

The church has all different kinds of needs, desires, and priorities that compete for her attention. When we are all willing to serve, we can know that the church can continue to move forward in her mission from Jesus. In Acts 6, 7, and 8, we see a model for this kind of service as God raises up servant leaders in the church to meet the needs of the congregation and ensure the church can stay on mission.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

1. The Need to Serve

Have a volunteer read Acts 6:1-7.

Explain: As the church grew, so did its problems. These verses record a cultural clash the early church encountered. The Greek widows in the church felt like they were being left out and not provided for. In order for the apostles to remain focused on their ministry—preaching and prayer—they called servant leaders to make sure the physical needs of people in the church were being met. Rather than helplessly watching the church divide over this

issue, seven men stepped up to serve. God calls people from within the church to meet the needs of the church.

What was the issue in this passage? (Refer to the commentary to help guide answers) Why were servant leaders needed?

Why did the apostles need other people in the church to step up and serve?

How does this example impact our church's ministry efforts?

What activities may have kept the church leaders from being aware of the problem with the widows?

Are there any groups in danger of going unnoticed in our church? Why? What would be some effective ways to serve these people?

Verse 3 notes that the qualifications to be a servant leader were three-fold: ethically, they must have a good reputation based on their character and conduct. Spiritually, they must be fully dependent on the Holy Spirit. Practically, they must have the wisdom to plan and carry out the necessary tasks. These characteristics are essential for serving the Lord by serving His people.

What trait had God been developing in you to prepare you for that specific area of service?

Pastor Todd mentioned in his sermon the call for us is to "get in game."

Why can getting in the game be a challenge for you today?

What hindrances do we often allow to stand in the way of us getting in the game?

Why is it valuable to be a team member on the court and not a sideline critic?

According to Acts 6:7, what was the result of this focus on service, and what change did it bring to the church's ministry?

Transition: Not only do we see the need to serve but there is also the call for us to know where to serve that will make an impact.

2. The Cost to Serve

Ask a volunteer to Read Acts 6:8-15

Because of God's favor and power, Stephen consistently performed great wonders and signs among the people. To this point, only the apostles had performed such deeds. The term 'wonders' refers to miracles that drew observers' awe and amazement. Signs were miracles that gave evidence of God's presence and activity and conveyed spiritual truths. God was working through Stephen in unusual and powerful ways, but the synagogue's members tried to refute the gospel Stephen proclaimed.

What attributes of Stephen are evident in these verses? Wisdom, faith, grace, power, and the Spirit's presence marked Stephen as an exceptional Christian who was well equipped for his role.

What do you consider the decisive factor in Stephen's ability to best his opponents in this discussion /debate (v. 10)? What implication does this have for us?

(Go through chapter 7 and summarize the message of Stephen).

Stephen's courage and fearlessness in standing by his Christian convictions aroused intense hostility. Unable to best him in debate, members of the Freedman's Synagogue induced men to charge Stephen falsely. The false accusers stirred up three groups: the people in general; the elders, who were respected leaders and represented the Sadducees; and the scribes, most of whom were Pharisees. The group took Stephen to the Sanhedrin, the Jews' high court.

What were the charges brought against Stephen?

What evidence is in our life that would make us "guilty" of being a follower of Christ?

Why do we struggle with being identified as a follower of Christ? How is the way we serve a way that people see evidence of Christ? Why is the message of the gospel critical for being coupled with our service for the Lord?

Transition: Once we understand the needs that exist in the church and we recognize the cost to follow the Lord, it's vital for us to see what difference our serving makes in the kingdom of God.

3. The Impact of Serving

Ask a volunteer to read Acts 8:1-4.

Stephen's martyrdom became an example to others of not only the cost of serving but also the impact it made immediately and eternally.

According to verse 4, what effect did the persecution and scattering of the early church have on the believers' faith? What can we learn from their example?

The immediate impact of the events surrounding Stephen's testimony and murder led to severe persecution of the church in Jerusalem. The disciples were likely scared and feared for their lives, but God used their distress for the cause of the gospel. All believers except the apostles were scattered to nearby regions. Stephen's death became a catalyst for the spread of the gospel to places it had never gone before (further examples include the spread of the gospel in Acts 11).

The eternal impact of Stephen's death led to other people being evangelists, such as Phillip. It also gave the church leaders recognition that God desired to use any means necessary to share the gospel, even Saul (Paul), that sought to tear apart the church.

Read Acts 1:8. What is the connection between Jesus' command and the events of Acts 8:1-4?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Main Points:

1. **The Need to Serve:** We need to see how God desires to use our gifts and talents to make an impact, and we have to see the needs of those around us.
2. **The Cost to Serve:** The cost to serve involves us recognizing that we are to live for Jesus in such a way that it costs our time, our talents, and even our priorities to put our lives aside for the glory of God to go forth.
3. **The Impact of Serving:** When we take the step to serve there will be both an immediate and eternal impact made for the kingdom of God.

God designed us to be both demonstrators and declarers of the gospel, and He gave us the church as a means to not only change the world in His name, but also connect with people who share our love and our mission.

Why is every member of our church important?

In what ways are you dependent on other members of your church? In what ways are others dependent on you?

How have we taken up the charge to serve our church and our community?

What can we do now to meet a need in our church?

What are some specific things we can ask God to accomplish through us as we serve in the areas we have discussed? Include these specifics in your closing prayer.

Pray

Spend some time thanking God for the people in your group, the relationships you've built, and the opportunities you have to serve each other, your church, and your community. Pray that God would give all a heart for service and an awareness of present needs in our church.

Commentary

Acts 6:1-7

6:1 In those days transitions to a new section, introducing an episode occurring probably five or more years after Pentecost. The Jerusalem church experienced great growth. They not only added people; the disciples were multiplying. The term disciple identified a Jesus follower in the sense of an adherent to a teacher.

As the church grew so did its problems. One cultural group within the church felt slighted: the Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jews, Dispersion descendants who had lived in the Greek-speaking world and culture. They had migrated back to Jerusalem. The Hebraic Jews resided in Palestine, probably speaking both Aramaic and Greek. The difference between these two groups was more than language; they had different customs and cultures in many facets of life and expression. A complaint or murmuring arose. The issue at hand was that the Hellenistic widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution, or the daily ministry, of food, an organized relief system. Widows with no immediate family to support and to care for their daily needs were, in that culture without today's social services, totally dependent on others for survival. Was this discrimination the result of prejudice or resentment or negligence or doctrinal? In all likelihood, the issue was not a theological difference between the two groups but likely an oversight or mistake in administration of the system.

6:2 A solution was needed. The Twelve or the apostles, summoned the whole company of the disciples or the church members to solve the problem. The apostles wanted the whole

church involved in finding the solution, which provides a good model for the church today when money is involved. The apostles tendered some of the blame. “It would not be right for us,” or pleasing in God’s eyes, “to give up preaching about God to handle financial matters.” These men were eyewitnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Their place in history was unequivocal. Their message was foundational to Christianity’s expansion. For these men to neglect that task would have been detrimental to the church’s mission. Financial matters referred to administering the social service funds to the widows. The apostles were not too busy for ministry, but preoccupied with the wrong ministry. Their main ministry was prayer and preaching.

6:3 The proposal was to select ... seven men. Picking seven men followed Jewish precedent. These men’s qualifications were four-fold: from among you (men of the church), of good (or honorable or above reproach) reputation, full of (or controlled by) the Spirit, and wisdom (or capable of handling the delicate situation with competence and sensitivity).

6:4 The apostles’ strategy enabled them to devote themselves to prayer and to the preaching ministry. Prayer would include both private and corporate petitions. The preaching ministry would include both proclaiming the good news of salvation to the lost and instructing in discipleship those who came to faith in Jesus. Both elements—prayer and preaching—form a natural pair. One without the other would prove ineffective, handicapping the church’s growth. These two fundamentals provide an excellent job description for modern pastors.

6:5-6 The plan was good. The proposal presented by the apostles was approved and accepted by the church. The apostles prayed and laid their hands on them, symbolizing the church’s authorizing and blessing the leaders to carry out their task. These men, having met the qualifications outlined by the apostles, were thus commissioned to fulfill a special responsibility to the church. They were gifted in this area, now they were to serve in order to meet the growing church’s needs. The seven assumed this responsibility.

6:7 The result of their action was that the preaching ... flourished, extending wider and wider, reaching more people for Christ. The apostles, distracted no longer, could apply themselves to their main responsibility—preaching and praying. In addition, the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly, meaning the church increased in people. The church spread even in an unexpected area—among Jewish priests. As we would expect, many priests lived in and around Jerusalem, some sources indicate as many as 8,000. Many of these struggled with daily survival. They were attracted to the Christian community who taught the truth, practiced community, and served one another.

Acts 6:8-15

6:8 A mark of the authenticity of Stephen’s work is that it was distinguished by great wonders and signs. God often affirmed the apostolic message in this way (5:12). The term grace may refer to his spiritual attractiveness or charm. More likely, it conveys the sense of God’s favor. The Greek term translated power gives us our word dynamite.

6:9-10 Though Jews from several different backgrounds disputed with Stephen, he swept them aside by use of his human intellectual gifts (wisdom) and divine empowerment (the Spirit).

6:11 Stephen’s supposedly blasphemous words on this occasion were probably similar to his speech in Ac 7, which emphasized Israel’s disobedience and the fulfillment of the OT in the ministry of Jesus, including His replacing the temple and the law. This would have aroused resentment among those who revered Moses and rejected Jesus as Messiah.

6:12 Like the apostles before him, especially Peter and John, Stephen was taken before the Sanhedrin after those from the synagogues were unable to stand against him. The confrontation now elevated from informal dispute to a more formal legal interrogation.

6:13 The fact that Stephen had not actually spoken blasphemous words is confirmed by the fact that false witnesses were produced to sustain the charges against him.

6:14 The charge against Stephen was similar to the charges against Jesus—that He would destroy the temple. They were also concerned about preserving their customs or oral laws, which they believed they had inherited from Moses.

6:15 This statement is reminiscent of Moses' shining face as he descended Mount Sinai after receiving the Commandments and Jesus' radiance on the mount of transfiguration. Stephen's face reflected something of God's glory, a result of the Holy Spirit's presence and empowerment.

Acts 8:1-4

8:1 The facts that the apostles were not the focus of the persecution and that it came about after Stephen's death suggest that the persecution focused primarily on Hellenistic Jewish Christians, although the entire church was affected.

8:3 Paul, or Saul, seems to have become lead persecutor. His reputation as a destructive force in Jerusalem (ravaging the church), and possibly elsewhere, seems to have preceded him to Damascus (9:13).