

We R2B A Servant People

Acts 6:1-7

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Introduction

Imagine a church growing so rapidly that it begins to face its own challenges – not from persecution, but from within, due to its very success! This is the situation the early church found itself in. The church in Jerusalem was exploding. Thousands were being added daily. This growth was exciting, but it also brought practical problems that threatened to derail their mission.

Today, from Acts 6:1-7, we'll see how the early church navigated these "growing pains," demonstrating principles of **leadership**, **service**, and **unity** that are vital for being a healthy church seeking to serve the Lord.

Highlight: As the church grew, the need for organization and delegation of responsibilities became apparent. **The apostles wisely recognized their primary calling and appointed others to serve in specific areas.**

A healthy church has effective leadership and organizational structures that enable ministry to flourish and prevent burnout.

Healthy Disciple - Healthy Church - Healthy Leaders.

Healthy leaders look like Jesus!

Jesus set the standard (after James and John were arguing)

*"But among you it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the **leader** should be like a **servant**."* Matthew 20:26, (Mark 10:43, Luke 22:26)

The Need: Growing Pains and Practical Needs (Acts 6:1)

Rapid Growth Creates New Challenges: *"Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number..."*

- The church was fulfilling the Great Commission, but expansion brings complexity.
- Just like a growing family needs more hands, a growing church needs more organized ministry.

A Complaint Arises: Neglect of a Specific Group: *"...a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution."*

- **Hellenists vs. Hebrews:** Not a theological dispute, but a cultural/ linguistic one. Hellenists were Greek-speaking Jews; Hebrews were Aramaic-speaking Jews.
- **The Issue:** Practical ministry (daily food distribution) was being unevenly applied. This wasn't necessarily intentional malice, but an oversight due to scale.
- **Significance:** Even in Spirit-filled communities, human imperfections and practical challenges emerge. Neglect of needs can lead to disunity and hinder the Gospel.

The Solution: Apostolic Wisdom and Shared Ministry (Acts 6:2-4)

Apostolic Priorities: *"And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, 'It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.'"*

- **Strategic Thinking:** The apostles recognized their primary calling: **prayer** and the **ministry of the Word**. This was non-negotiable for the spiritual health and direction of the church.
- **Delegation, Not Dismissal:** They didn't ignore the problem; they sought a solution that preserved their focus while addressing the need.

The Call for Qualified Servants: *"Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty."*

- **"Good Reputation" Character matters:** Trustworthy, respected individuals. Those who are already serving.
- **"Full of the Spirit":** Spiritual vitality, dependence on God, divine enablement. Not just good organizers, but godly people.
- **"And of wisdom":** Practical discernment, problem-solving ability, able to handle sensitive situations.
- **"Whom we will appoint to this duty":** The apostles would lay hands on them, affirming their calling and commissioning them.

Drawing from the various passages: **"ABOVE REPROACH"**.

"The qualifications for elder and deacon in IBC look remarkably similar. Indeed, while elders and deacons function in distinct roles, very little separates them in terms of their moral expectations. Those who minister to the local church, whether as leaders (elders) or as servants (deacons), must be those who allow Jesus to take lordship over every aspect of their lives. The Scottish pastor Robert Murray M'Cheyne once said, 'The greatest need of my people is my personal holiness.' The greatest need of the people of the IBC Madrid is the personal holiness of its elders and deacons. Conspicuously absent from Biblical qualification is any consideration of specific talents. This is not because elders or deacons lack such talents, nor because they are expected to do only the most menial work. Rather, by focusing on character, the Bible opens the door for men and women with all spiritual gifts to serve the church." (From IBC Elders and Deacons 2025.)

Presbuteros: Elder, overseer, shepherd are all used synonymously.

Diakonos: Servant, minister (from the Latin), messenger.

Roles and Responsibilities, as opposed to a title or office!

Last year ... the Refresh (Church– Re-vitalization) Process.

This year at Immanuel, we are taking a deep dive into the role of every individual in the Church. Our goal is to establish clear and simple role descriptions for every task, including expectations, requirements, opportunities, and responsibilities. A natural starting point is with our senior leadership. What are your expectations of your pastors, shepherds, elders, deacons and team coordinators? Do these align with the teachings of Scripture?

Currently we are working on role descriptions for all ministries...

A Clear Division of Labor: *"But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."*

- This isn't about one ministry being "better" than another, but about distinct callings and efficient use of gifts.
- Both **Word ministry** and **practical service** are essential for a healthy church.

The Outcome: Unity, Growth, and Glorification (Acts 6:5-7)

The Congregation's Affirmation: *"And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch."*

- **Unity in Action:** The people embraced the solution, demonstrating trust in their leadership and a desire for harmony.
- **Notable Names:** Stephen and Philip would go on to become significant figures in the spread of the Gospel (Acts 7 & 8). This "service" role was foundational to larger ministry.

Apostolic Commissioning: *"These they set before the apostles, and after praying, they laid their hands on them."*

- **Ordination/ Commissioning:** A public affirmation and spiritual blessing for their new roles. This underscores the spiritual nature of even "practical" ministry.

The Impact: Unhindered Gospel Advancement: *"And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."*

- **Spiritual Growth:** The Word of God was unhindered and continued to spread.
- **Numerical Growth:** The church continued to multiply, even reaching those who were traditionally resistant (the priests).
- **Mission Focused:** By addressing internal issues with wisdom and shared responsibility, the church was able to focus on its primary mission: spreading the Gospel.

Conclusion

The early church faced a crisis of growth, addressed it with wisdom and shared ministry, and saw the Word of God flourish as a result.

Application:

- **For Leaders:** Prioritize prayer and the Word. Discern your primary calling. Be willing to delegate and empower others, recognizing and affirming their gifts.
- **For All Believers:** Recognize that all ministry, whether "spiritual" or "practical," is vital. Be willing to serve where there is need, with character, full of the Spirit, and wisdom. Value unity over personal preferences.
- **For the Church:** Healthy growth requires intentionality in organization and a willingness to address practical needs. When we operate in unity, with diverse gifts complementing each other, the Gospel advances and God is glorified.

Call to Action/Challenge: Where are our "growing pains" today? How can we better embrace shared ministry, empower servants, and ensure that nothing hinders the proclamation and living out of God's Word in our midst? Let us be a church where both the Word and service thrive, leading to God's greater gains.

Let's work together to become the disciples we **R2B**—so together we can become the people we **R2B**!