



## Summary

In Acts chapter six, we encounter a pivotal moment in the early church that speaks directly to how we handle growth, conflict, and the balance between spiritual and practical ministry. As the church multiplied rapidly, a complaint arose that Hellenist widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. This wasn't intentional discrimination, but rather a management challenge born from explosive growth. The apostles' response reveals profound wisdom: they refused to abandon their primary calling of prayer and teaching God's Word, yet they didn't dismiss the physical needs as unimportant. Instead, they established the deacon ministry, choosing seven men of excellent character, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, to serve tables. This decision teaches us that both spiritual and physical ministry are essential in reflecting who Jesus is. A church that only focuses on physical needs becomes a social service organization, while one that ignores practical needs fails to demonstrate God's heart for the poor. The beauty of this solution is that it actually accelerated church growth, with even many priests becoming obedient to the faith. We see that when we organize according to God's wisdom, honoring both the Word and service, the entire body of Christ flourishes. The story of Stephen, a mere waiter who became a powerful witness, reminds us that no role in the church is insignificant when filled with faith and the Holy Spirit.





## Points

### **Title: Serving Tables and Serving the Word: The Foundation of Church Growth**

#### **Sermon Summary:**

This sermon examines Acts 6:1-15, exploring how the early church addressed organizational challenges while maintaining spiritual priorities. The message emphasizes the critical balance between meeting physical needs and maintaining devotion to prayer and the ministry of God's Word. Through the appointment of the first deacons to serve widows, the church established a pattern that continues today: some are called to meet spiritual needs through teaching and prayer, while others are called to meet physical needs through practical service. Both callings reflect God's excellence and are essential for healthy church growth. The sermon concludes with Stephen's example—a "mere waiter" who became a powerful witness, demonstrating that faithful service in physical matters can lead to spiritual boldness and impact.

#### **Key Points:**

- - The early church faced a growth management issue when Hellenist widows were being overlooked in daily distribution
- - God's concern for widows is mentioned over 40 times in Scripture, reflecting His heart for the vulnerable
- - The apostles wisely refused to abandon prayer and the Word of God to serve tables, instead appointing seven qualified men as deacons
- - Church growth presents two inherent difficulties: not enough growth, and too much growth too fast
- - Both spiritual ministry (teaching/prayer) and physical ministry (serving) are essential and must reflect God's excellence
- - The qualifications for deacons include good reputation, being full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and godly character
- - Stephen exemplifies how a servant called to wait tables became empowered to perform signs and wonders and defend the faith
- - When ideology is proven false by godly logic, opponents resort to false witnesses, lies, and corrupted justice—Satan's limited playbook
- - The outcome of proper church organization was explosive growth: "the word of God spread and the number of disciples multiplied greatly"

#### **Scripture Reference:**

- - Primary: Acts 6:1-15
- - Supporting: Psalm 68:5, Psalm 146:9, Deuteronomy 24:19-21, Jeremiah 49:11, James 1:27, 1 Timothy 5:3-8, Matthew 23:14, Luke 4:16-19, Romans 10:17, Colossians 3:23, Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Timothy 3:1-13



**Stories:**

- - The account of the early church addressing the complaint about Hellenist widows being neglected in daily distribution
- - The appointment of the first seven deacons (Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas)
- - Stephen's confrontation with the Alexandrian intellectual elites in the synagogue of the freedmen
- - Jesus reading from Isaiah 61 in the Nazareth synagogue to introduce His ministry
- - The implicit reference to Saul of Tarsus (Paul) likely being present at Stephen's theological debates, with his teacher Gamaliel's comment about being unable to keep Saul supplied with books
- - The Last Supper as the ultimate meal prepared by God and served through His servants





## Scripture

### Explicitly Mentioned References

## Old Testament

- Psalm 68:4-5 - God as father of the fatherless and defender of widows
- Psalm 146:9 - The Lord watches over strangers, relieves the fatherless and widow
- Deuteronomy 24:19 - Leaving sheaves for the stranger, fatherless, and widow
- Deuteronomy 24:21 - Not gleaning grapes afterward for the stranger, fatherless, and widow
- Jeremiah 49:11 - Leave your fatherless children; let widows trust in me
- Isaiah 61:1-2 - The Spirit of the Lord is upon me (quoted by Jesus)

## New Testament

- Acts 6:1-7 - Main passage: The choosing of the seven deacons
- Acts 2:47 - The Lord added daily to the church
- Matthew 23:14 - Woe to scribes and Pharisees who devour widows' houses
- James 1:27 - Pure religion: visiting orphans and widows
- 1 Timothy 5:3-8 - Instructions regarding widows
- Luke 4:16-19 - Jesus reading from Isaiah in the Nazareth synagogue
- Romans 10:17 - Faith comes by hearing, hearing by the word of God
- Colossians 3:23-24 - Whatever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord
- Ephesians 4:11-16 - Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers for equipping the saints
- 1 Timothy 3:1-13 - Qualifications for bishops/elders and deacons
- John 1:1 - In the beginning was the Word

### Additional Relevant Verses for Themes Discussed

## Church Organization and Leadership

- Titus 1:5-9 - Qualifications for elders
- 1 Peter 5:1-4 - Instructions to elders

## Caring for the Poor and Widows

- Exodus 22:22-24 - Do not afflict widows or orphans
- Proverbs 31:8-9 - Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves
- Isaiah 1:17 - Learn to do right; seek justice, defend the oppressed



## Church Growth and Unity

- Acts 4:32 - The multitude of believers were of one heart and soul
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 - The body of Christ with many members

## Spiritual Warfare and False Witnesses

- Acts 7:54-60 - Stephen's martyrdom (referenced for next week's study)
- John 8:44 - The devil is a liar and the father of lies



Any church whose primary focus becomes meeting the physical needs it is made aware of will devolve into a social services organization. Any church which ignores the physical needs it is made aware of will no longer reflect God's concern for the poor and will find itself only ministering to those of independent means.

Some in his church will be called by God to meet the spiritual needs in his church. Very important. Likewise, some in his church will be called by God to meet the physical needs in his church. Also, very important.

No one is called to not do anything. You may be the person God is calling to do that thing since you are the one who noticed it and was concerned enough to bring it to our attention.

Stephen, a mere waiter in the church, suddenly finds himself going toe-to-toe theologically with the Alexandrian intellectual elites in the synagogue of the freedmen. They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which Stephen spoke.

Ideology is always, always, always proven false by the superiority of godly logic. When we talk about godly logic, we're talking about the proper application of God's word.

All religion is about what you can do for God. Relationship with Jesus is about what Jesus has already done for you, and all you must do, and you must, is receive it.

## Discussion Questions



How does the early church's response to the complaint about neglected widows demonstrate the balance between meeting physical needs and maintaining spiritual priorities? What can modern churches learn from this approach?

The sermon describes Stephen as 'God's waiter' who served a meal prepared by God through his theological arguments. In what ways are you called to serve what God has prepared, even when facing harsh opposition?

Why do you think God mentions His concern for widows over 40 times in Scripture, and how should this shape the church's ministry today beyond just organized programs?

The apostles recognized that too much growth too fast can be as problematic as not enough growth. How can church leaders today identify when rapid growth is creating management issues that need to be addressed?

What does it reveal about the Holy Spirit's work that the Hellenists and Hebrews, who would normally shun each other, were worshiping Jesus together? How does the Gospel break down cultural and ethnic barriers in your own community?

The sermon states that ideology is always proven false by the superiority of godly logic. Can you think of examples where proper application of God's Word has exposed the weakness of worldly ideologies in your own life or culture?

Stephen was chosen to serve tables but ended up doing great signs and wonders and debating intellectual elites. What does this teach us about how God uses those who faithfully serve in seemingly small roles?

How does the requirement that deacons be men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, elevate the importance of serving physical needs in the church? Why is godly character essential even for practical service?

The sermon suggests that Saul of Tarsus may have been present during Stephen's arguments and that Stephen's words would have eaten away at his soul. How does God sometimes use uncomfortable truth to prepare hearts for eventual transformation?

What does Stephen's face appearing like the face of an angel while facing false accusations teach us about maintaining peace and confidence when we are persecuted for speaking God's truth?

## [Small Group Guide: Acts 6 - Serving in Unity](#)



## Opening Prayer

Begin your group time by thanking God for His Word and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your discussion and application.

## Icebreaker

Share about a time when you felt overlooked or when you noticed someone else being overlooked. How was it resolved?

---

## Key Takeaways from the Sermon

1. God's Heart for the Vulnerable: God mentions His concern for widows over 40 times in Scripture, demonstrating His care for those in need.
  2. Two Problems with Church Growth: Not enough growth AND too much growth too fast (which creates management challenges).
  3. The Birth of Deacon Ministry: The apostles wisely delegated physical needs to qualified servants so they could focus on prayer and teaching God's Word.
  4. Qualifications Matter: Even to "serve tables," men needed to be of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.
  5. The Power of Prioritization: When spiritual leadership prioritized the Word and prayer while empowering others to serve, the Word of God spread and disciples multiplied greatly.
- 

## Discussion Questions

### Understanding the Text (Acts 6:1-7)

1. What was the specific complaint that arose in the early church? Why do you think this happened even though it wasn't intentional?
2. What solution did the apostles propose? What does this tell us about wise leadership?
3. Look at the qualifications in verse 3. Why would such high standards be required for those serving widows' meals?
4. What was the result of addressing this problem biblically (verse 7)? What does this teach us about handling conflicts in the church?

## Personal Reflection



5. The sermon mentioned that "no one is called to not do anything." What area of need have you noticed in the church? Could God be calling you to meet that need?
6. Read 1 Timothy 3:8-13. How does the description of deacons challenge your understanding of service in the church?
7. The pastor described himself as your "designated studier." How does understanding the time and effort that goes into teaching God's Word affect your appreciation for biblical teaching?
8. Stephen was "just a waiter" who became bold in faith and powerful in ministry. What does this say about God's view of "ordinary" service?

## The Challenge of Stephen (Acts 6:8-15)

9. What made Stephen effective in his witness (verses 8-10)? How had his time being taught God's Word prepared him for this moment?
10. When Stephen's opponents couldn't win the argument, what tactics did they use (verses 11-14)? Where do you see similar tactics being used today?
11. Despite intense opposition, Stephen's face looked like "the face of an angel" (verse 15). What does this reveal about the peace God gives His faithful servants?

---

### Practical Applications

### This Week's Challenge

Choose ONE of the following to put into practice:

1. Notice a Need: Identify one physical or practical need in your church and take a step to address it (or bring it to leadership's attention).
2. Deepen Your Study: Commit to spending 30 minutes this week studying a passage of Scripture on your own, asking God to teach you directly from His Word.
3. Examine Your Character: Review the qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Choose one area where you need to grow and ask God to help you develop that characteristic.
4. Serve with Excellence: Whatever role you currently have (at church, work, or home), commit to doing it "as to the Lord" with excellence this week (Colossians 3:23).
5. Support Your Teachers: Write a note of encouragement to your pastor or a Bible study leader, thanking them for their faithful study and teaching of God's Word.

### Group Activity

Gifts and Calling Inventory: Go around the circle and have each person share:



- One way they see themselves serving the spiritual needs of others
- One way they see themselves serving the physical needs of others
- One area where they'd like to grow in service

Have the group affirm the gifts they see in each person.

---

## Memory Verse

Colossians 3:23-24 *"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ."*

---

## Looking Ahead

Next week we'll study Acts 7 and see Stephen's powerful defense before the council and his martyrdom. Consider reading Acts 7 before your next group meeting.

---

## Closing Prayer

- Pray for wisdom to identify where God is calling each person to serve
  - Pray for your church leadership as they prioritize the Word and prayer
  - Pray for boldness like Stephen's to stand for truth
  - Pray for unity in your church as different people serve in different ways
- 

## Additional Resources

- Re-read Acts 6 several times this week
- Study the Old Testament passages mentioned about God's care for widows
- Reflect on Ephesians 4:11-16 about how the body of Christ works together

## [Daily Devotional](#)

## 5-Day Devotional: Serving with Spirit and Truth



## **Day 1: The Heart of God for the Vulnerable**

Reading: Psalm 146:5-9; James 1:27

Devotional: God's heart beats for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. Throughout Scripture, He reveals Himself as defender of those society overlooks. When the early church faced complaints about neglected widows, they didn't dismiss the concern—they addressed it immediately with wisdom and care. This reveals a powerful truth: authentic faith always translates into tangible care for the vulnerable. Pure religion isn't merely correct doctrine; it's visiting those in trouble and keeping ourselves unstained by the world's callousness. Today, ask yourself: Who are the overlooked people in my sphere of influence? How might God be calling me to reflect His compassionate character by meeting a practical need? Remember, when we care for the least of these, we're serving Christ Himself.

## **Day 2: Multiplying Through Proper Priorities**

Reading: Acts 6:1-7; Ephesians 4:11-16

Devotional: The early church faced a beautiful problem: too much growth, too fast. The apostles' response teaches us that spiritual leadership requires wise prioritization. They didn't abandon physical needs, but neither did they sacrifice prayer and the Word to meet them. Instead, they empowered others to serve. This created multiplication—both in ministry effectiveness and in disciples. When the church maintains its commitment to Scripture and prayer while mobilizing believers to serve according to their gifts, the Word spreads and disciples multiply greatly. What's your primary calling in God's kingdom? Are you protecting time for that calling while empowering others in theirs? Healthy churches don't have one person doing everything; they have every person doing something according to God's design.

## **Day 3: Character Qualifies for Service**

Reading: 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Acts 6:3-6

Devotional: Notice the qualifications for serving widows: good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit, and wisdom. Even "waiting tables" in God's kingdom requires godly character. This elevates every act of service to sacred status. God doesn't divide life into spiritual and secular categories—He calls us to excellence in everything because all service is ultimately unto Him. Stephen was a deacon, a server of widows, yet he performed great signs and wonders and boldly proclaimed truth to intellectual elites. His "ordinary" faithfulness positioned him for extraordinary impact. Whatever role you occupy—whether visible or behind-the-scenes—pursue it with reverent character and Spirit-filled excellence. God sees your faithful service, and He often uses those who serve well in small things for greater kingdom purposes.

## **Day 4: When Ideology Meets Truth**

Reading: Acts 6:8-15; John 8:31-47



Devotional: Stephen's opponents couldn't refute his wisdom, so they resorted to false witnesses and manipulation. This pattern repeats throughout history: when ideology confronts truth, and truth proves superior, ideologues abandon reason for force. Stephen knew what he believed and why—his theology wasn't borrowed phrases but deeply understood conviction. This made him unshakable even before hostile courts. In our age of competing narratives and cancel culture, we need Stephen's combination: irrefutable knowledge of Scripture, Spirit-empowered boldness, and the face of an angel amid accusation. Are you grounded enough in God's Word to withstand intellectual assault? Can you give a reason for your hope with gentleness and respect? Invest time in knowing what you believe and why, because tested faith becomes unshakable faith.

### **Day 5: The Face of God's Waiter**

Reading: Acts 6:15; Colossians 3:23-24; Matthew 25:31-40

Devotional: As Stephen faced his accusers, his face shone like an angel's. Why? Because he knew he was about to serve a perfectly prepared meal from God's kitchen. Like a waiter excited to present the chef's masterpiece, Stephen couldn't wait to declare truth—even to those seeking his destruction. This is the joy of one who serves God: knowing the message is true, the Source is perfect, and the outcome is in God's hands. Whether you're teaching Scripture, serving the poor, or simply living faithfully in your daily work, you're God's waiter bringing His provision to a hungry world. Serve with excellence, knowing the Chef has prepared something extraordinary. Let your face reflect the peace and joy of one who knows they're delivering exactly what people need, even when they don't yet know it themselves.

