

I don't often begin with a recommendation but, this morning, I want to encourage all of you to watch the recently released documentary on...The Bee Gees. Yes. The Bee Gees. Now, I know some of you immediately think of the song *Staying Alive*, and you should because it's an amazing song, but that may be followed by disco backlash and you dismiss the idea. What you may not know though, is that this band made music for five decades, wrote over 1,000 songs, had dozens of top 40 hits, and were incapable of buttoning their shirts. In the words of Justin Timberlake: "The Bee Gees are awesome!" And the Presslers agree. All of us have had their tunes playing non-stop, we are blaming absolutely everything on the nights on Broadway, and I keep asking Martha to be tender with my love, though she doesn't like to be called Fanny. If you have no idea what I'm talking about, watch the movie or give them a listen.

Their success was from the way all three of their voices worked together to create a beautiful, perfect, and complete sound. One of my favorite parts is when big brother Barry is talking about their voices, saying he and Robin usually sang the lead part and shared the melody. But then he talked about his brother Maurice saying, "He always knew where the put the harmony so that it all worked." The implication was that, only with that third part, the harmony, could their sound be complete and effective. And he wasn't Jive Talkin' when he said that.

So, why do I talk about the Bee Gees? Because they are like the church. When each of the three played their part, their music thrived. In the church, all of us have a part to play, some melody, some harmony, and **when everyone plays their part, the church thrives**. But many in the church don't know they have a part, what that part is, or how they step into it. This results in parts being unplayed, opportunities being missed, work remaining incomplete, and spiritual and physical needs going unmet. But it doesn't have to be this way. This morning, we'll see how the early church responds when a part wasn't being played and a need wasn't being met.

[Acts 6:1-6] Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ² 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. ³ 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. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." ⁵ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

This scene occurs roughly five years after the day of Pentecost. The spread of the Gospel among the Jewish community in Jerusalem has been an overwhelming success. Many have come to faith, but with that growth comes new challenges. Ask any business owner who has experienced massive growth and they'll tell you it comes with challenges and the need to change. It's the same thing with the church.

A group of needy widows was being neglected in the distribution of food. Hebrew Jews were born and raised in Israel, spoke Aramaic as their primary language, and read the Hebrew Old Testament. These widows came from the group known as the Hellenists, Diaspora Jews who

grew up outside the land and spoke and read the Old Testament primarily in Greek. Many Hellenist Jews returned to the Promised Land to live out their final years but, when husbands died, family was nowhere close, and they were in need of care. This linguistic and cultural difference created division between the two groups, most notably in worship. We'll see a Hellenist synagogue next week. But now something amazing is happening. They are seeking to live together as one in this new Christ-centered community. This administrative breakdown, though, was a threat to the function, witness, and mission of the community. The apostles engage and show us three principles of getting everyone playing their part for the church to thrive.

The church is equal parts organism and organization.

Up to this point, most of what we've seen has been an organic, relational gospel movement. A growing group of people has come together to love God, one another, and their neighbors, and preach the Gospel in word and deed. It is a living, breathing, Jesus-loving community who is simply doing life together. We read that and say "Oh, that's the church! That's what we should be!" And you'd be right. We should aspire to have that kind of community. But for the church to be/do what the church must be/do, there also has to be organization in place. Many don't like that. I have heard the comment "The church operates too much like a business." We bristle at words like resources, allocation, delegation, prioritize, mission, vision, values. But we've already seen evidence of that in Ch 4 as people sold property, laid it at the apostles' feet, and the apostles distributed it to those in need. If the church isn't organized, things and people fall through the cracks, needs aren't met, and the potential of those in the congregation remains untapped.

We can lean too far organically or lean too far organizationally, so we have to keep them in balance. Too organic, we won't have much direction, our work will be disorganized and incomplete, resources will be wasted or left dormant, and we won't take much ground. Think supper club; lot of relationship, not much else. We can also lean too far organizationally and lose the heart of our community. Think of a to-do list. But organization defines mission and success, clarifies our work, maximizes resources, and puts us in a position to be responsive to needs. After a period of organic and relational growth, an administrative breakdown left a group of people in need and the church leaders moved to address it organizationally. They commissioned seven men to lead the effort to care for the widows and, by all accounts, it was a success.

This past week is a perfect example. As our city and state were ravaged by the winter storm, our organization went into action to care for the organism. We streamed an online-only service last Sunday. We made calls to everyone 70+ years of age in our database, one of whom asked, "Are you calling everyone, or just us old people?" Our Life Group leaders cared for their group members, fulfilling their commissioning in that position. We used social media to inform all of you of resources available in the area and connected with several of you to engage a more serious need. None of that happens without organization. None of that happens at a moment's notice. Our church thrived in the chaos because we had the system and people in place to do so.

God has a part for everyone to play.

I have heard many pastors talk about the struggle of someone coming up to them and saying, "Our church needs _____ ministry." What's usually being said is "You need to start, lead, and resource this ministry." Churches have been good at training congregations to that approach over

the last 40 years. The problem is that it's unbiblical and unsustainable. It leads to an ever-growing need for more staff and robs church members of the opportunity to play your part.

Here, the Hellenists complain their widows are being neglected. They are essentially going to leadership and saying, "We need to start a Hellenist widow ministry." The apostles' response? "Great. We agree. You do it." They say that for two reasons. First, the apostles' call is first and foremost to pray to God and preach the Gospel. They do not believe serving widows is beneath them, but anything else they do in the church takes them away from that primary calling. They have learned that through experience. If they try to do it all, something will fall through the cracks, namely praying and preaching the gospel. **They conclude this isn't their part to play.** One of the most painful things I had to do when I stepped into this role was give up teaching the pre-marriage class. But, as Lead Pastor, I had a different part to play than I did beforehand, so that ministry responsibility and opportunity had to go to someone else.

Second, the apostles also recognize those bringing the complaint are the perfect ones to address the need. It is THEIR part to play...melody and harmony...and the apostles tell the assembled congregation to choose seven from among them to lead the way. All seven have Greek names (and we'll see Stephen and Philip again). They are Hellenists themselves. They are in proximity to the widows, know their condition intimately, and are burdened by it. The people are thrilled, the problem solved, and **more people are now playing their part in the mission.**

Here's the thing with God-given purpose: **If God makes you see it, God may ask you to solve it.** These Hellenists are connected relationally, can relate culturally, and have clearly been burdened by what they have witnessed. God stirred their hearts, and they act. That makes them the perfect choice. God has you in places and among people in here and out there that he wants you burdened for. We have 1,200 people in this church, and you may know what's going on with a group of them better than anyone else. And the more you know, the greater your burden, because God is stirring your heart to act...not to go get someone else to take care of it, but to get someone to help you take care of it. I want to have that conversation with you. That's what we mean when we say Fellowship is a training and launching ground. God grabs your heart and tells you to go and the church is here to help you, equip you, and commission you into it. **The more we do that, the more of us will go from observer to participant, from consumer to investor.**

Here's a list of members leading ministry right now: Jaime and Rob Langworthy – Prison, Melissa and Darren Wickam – Operation Christmas Child, Paul Curbo – Table Talk, Brenda Knee – Financial Allies, Mary Beth Gaylor – Prayer Partners, Susan Clark – Visitation Team, Holli Sandborn – Card Team, Patrick Metang – Meal Team. These are church members playing their part, and the ministry of Fellowship is being fulfilled because of them. God has something to write next to your name too.

Every part has the same qualifications. The seven are to be full of the Spirit and wisdom and their character well accepted by others. They will be working with a vulnerable group and asked to steward valuable resources. And while their part is to care for these widows, it's a good list for anyone who looks to serve in God's church.

Mission and relationship are inseparable. The only reason we're having this conversation is because Jesus Christ saved us and his Spirit now dwells in us. **If we are to play our part in and with God's people, that only happens if we are filled and enabled by God's Spirit.** His Spirit directs, gifts, and empowers our ministry and the more he leads, the greater impact we can have.

But that enablement only matters if our character conforms to that of Christ. Many gifted individuals whom God wants to work through disqualify themselves through their character because ministry is a character endeavor. You can be a doctor, accountant, mechanic, or politician and succeed with lousy character. That's not so in ministry. Over the last few weeks you have likely heard of the tragic and heartbreaking news that an internationally-known apologist, who just passed away, was up to no good. His ministry bore much fruit, and many came to faith because of him. What we don't know is how much his impact was limited by his actions and, now that it's out, how his tarnished reputation will tarnish the reputation and work of Christ. If you want to play your part, first check who is leading your life and what those closest to you think about your character.

[Acts 6:7] ⁷ 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.

In what is the second of Luke's summary passages, it's clear **the leadership of this moment led to the advancement of the mission.** The widows were taken care of by the seven and the apostles were able to spend their time praying and preaching the Word. If the preaching stopped, people wouldn't hear the message. If the community was broken and in need, people wouldn't see the difference the message makes. **But everyone played their part and the church thrived.**

Feel the weight. We often use "burden" in a negative way, but there is a divine discontentment God gives us when he allows us to see something that needs attention and stirs our heart to do something about it. We have to have the courage, faith, and willingness to search for it and ask God to help us discover it. If you want to know your place but aren't sure how, Repurposed starts on March 30 and Younique will be offered several times this calendar year. You will be asked to consider: What do you I enjoy? What gets me up in the morning? What keeps me up at night? What must I do? They are intended to lead you to greater God and self-awareness so that you will have a greater clarity and passion about what part you have to play.

Find and play your part. As you grow in clarity, begin to look for opportunities to live it out. Process it with your Life Group. Connect with us. We want to have that conversation with you. 1 Corinthians 12 makes it clear every member of the church is necessary. That means you. Raise your hand, step forward, and let's figure it out together. We may have something for you here. We may point you to something outside of these walls (We connected a woman burdened for unexpectedly pregnant mothers to an outside ministry). Or we may invite you to lead a ministry to Hellenist widows! You are not alone. God's Spirit is in you and God's people are with you.

I pray for a day where these conversations are happening all over the place. There is a song God wants us to sing together, but it will only sound good if all of us are singing our part, whether

melody or harmony. But if we do, that song will fill our church with life, proclaim God's Word to the world, and make an impact beyond anything we can imagine.