

## Restore Small Group Questions - Acts Week 10 - Leadership Structure —3/23/2025

**SCRIPTURES (NIV)**

**Acts 6: 1-7** In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews[a] among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. **2** 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. **3** 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 **4** and will give our attention to **prayer and the ministry of the word.**" **5** 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. **6** They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. **7** 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.

**Genesis 1:1-2** - In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. **2** Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

**Galatians 2:11-14** - When Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. **12** For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. **13** The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. **14** When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

**James 2:1-4** - My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. **2** Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. **3** If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," **4** have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

**1 Timothy 3:8-10** - In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. **9** They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. **10** They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

**KEY POINTS:**

God is creative - He brings order and structure out of chaos. The bible states that God created the heavens and earth and brought order from chaos. In Acts 6, we also find the beginning of disorder and drama both inside and outside of the church. Humans inherited from God the talent to bring order out of chaos and we see that demonstrated by the apostles as the church dealt with the challenges of growth and change.

- **Church Challenges:**

- One of the challenges being faced by the apostles was that rapid and exponential growth created some chaos within the existing leadership infrastructure. The infrastructure was inadequate to handle the expanding needs of all the people numbering in the thousands. The specific issue was the food distribution method overlooked some people - the Jewish hellenistic widows.
- Another challenge was the potential favoritism or discrimination between the Hellenistic Jews and the Hebraic Jews. The Hellenistic Jews had adopted cultures that were more like the gentiles (Greeks) while the Hebraic Jews focused on their cultural heritage separate from everyone else. The differences caused tension and favoritism which even affected Peter whom Paul calls out (Galatians 2) for his hypocrisy. James also tells the Jews not to show favoritism (James 2). Although favoritism is a human tendency we must be aware of it and be on guard against it.

- **Leadership Solution:**

- Identity Focus - The apostles identified their focus to be on **“Prayer and Ministry of the Word”**. When stretched by too many tasks you must reset your focus on those things that cannot be compromised. Identifying their focus allowed the apostles to introduce a new leadership position in the church — The deacon, to carry out the food distribution ministry. The **‘prayer and ministry of the word’** ministry and the ‘food distribution’ ministry were both valuable but each had a different focus.
- Identify Leadership Character - Paul’s letter to Timothy highlights the character traits for deacons: - worthy of respect - sincere - not indulging in wine - not pursuing dishonest gain - deep faith - clear conscience - must be time tested - nothing against them.
- Identify Job Description - Clarify what their job is - in the early church, it was ensuring equal portions of food for all with no favoritism. The deacons were presented to the apostles who prayed and laid hands on them.

**Restore:**

- There are no favorites in God’s Kingdom - all are equal at the foot of the cross and everyone runs their own race. We are all in different stages of our journey with Jesus.
- Everyone is called to a different role in the church. Understanding gifting is critical.
- Leadership and discipleship go hand in hand (interwoven) and character matters.
- Jesse’s focus is on **Prayer and Ministry of the Word** — —growth will mandate additional structure and leaders to minimize chaos and tension. We have a plan!

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Why do you think the apostles believed it was important for them to focus on **‘prayer and the ministry of the word’** rather than distributing food? Is favoritism an issue in the Christian church today? What does it look like?
2. Are there lessons that we can learn from the rapid growth of the early Church that are applicable today?
3. Discuss the principles of conflict resolution demonstrated by the apostles in the food distribution problem. Are these principles applicable to today’s church?

4. Discuss the criteria used to select the 'seven' - "men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom". Are these criteria still in use in our western christian culture for selecting church leaders? Who chose the seven men in the early church?
5. The names of the seven men are all 'Hellenist' names- "Stephen... Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas". What do you think the rationale was for selecting all Hellenist's for the role of deacon?
6. The devil has tried to destroy the infant church by persecution from without, then by deception within and now seeks to sow seeds of dissension within. What or who enabled the apostles to overcome Satan's attack and solve the problem? Do we still have that power today?
7. Could the primacy of the **ministry of "the word of God**, which always kept the death and resurrection of Christ first and foremost, be the basis for the quantum leap in disciples in the early church? What does it mean for church leaders to be in prayer and the study/ministry of the Word?
8. Equal to the '**ministry of the word of God**' is **PRAYER?** (Acts 6:4) What does it look like to be in the spirit of prayer?