

This Is Us | Servants of Jesus

Acts 6:1-7 & 1 Timothy 3:8-16

Acts 6:1-7

1 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. 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.

1 Timothy 3:8-16

8 Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. 11 Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. 13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. 14 I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. 16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

This Is Us [Shepherd Photo]

1. We aspire to be the most caring church you've ever heard of.
2. There's a catch: To care well means we all have to care.
3. If we are consumers of care, we will cease to be a caring church.
4. Today: Establishment of our Deacon Ministry

Moses & Jethro – Exodus 18 [Moses Judging Israelites Drawing]

- Exodus:
 - Moses sent to liberate the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery (plagues);
 - Crossed the Red Sea ("horse and rider thrown into the sea");
 - Now a congregation in the wilderness with no homes, economy, no organized national defense, no food, little water (sounding like a really bad idea);
 - God feeds the Israelite sojourners bread from heaven, water from a rock...;
 - But this congregation needs administration in regards to justice.
 - Jethro observed that Moses was meeting with every Hebrew and teaching them God's word and adjudicating every issue of dissension;

Exodus 18:17-23

"Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. 18 You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone. 19 Now obey my voice; I will give you advice, and God be with you! You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God, 20 and you shall warn them about the statutes and the laws, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do. 21 Moreover, look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. 22 And let them judge the people at all times. Every great matter they shall bring to you, but any small matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. 23 If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace."

- Not necessarily a "deacon text", but it does address the burden many pastors bear, which is to be present in every person's troubles.

- As a pastor, when I am expected to be involved with each of you, I am involved with very few of you (spread too thin).

Almost the identical problem in Acts 6:1-7

- New congregation liberated from sin and the power of Satan, and they are now learning, like the ancient Israelites, to live together as a new community.
- Problem: Greek-speaking widows neglected during food distribution: [**Widow Photo**]
 - Widows: particularly unjust, normally cared for by family, but...
 - Greek-speaking (racial issue – not ethnically Jewish)
- Leaders of the church devoted to prayer and the teaching of God's word;
- Appointed men of good reputation who were full of the Spirit and wisdom to serve this overlooked demographic.

We Must Embrace Humility — Like a Child [Child Photo]

- Humility — Jesus said the kingdom is fit only for those who adopt the humble, needy posture of a child...
- Me: I'm learning I can't make you all happy; that I can't do what only the Spirit can do through the church; I am committed to developing our elders and CG leaders; trust me and our elders to ensure you are cared for;
- You: Humbly give us a gift — humbly accept the love of brothers & sisters that don't have "pastor" in front of their name.
- My responsibility: Is to ensure that you are well-shepherded. Not to personally shepherd each of you. (Feast: This is not about getting away from you; it's about being faithful to my calling.)
- "...by lazily abdicating the essential work of deciding and directing, establishing values and setting goals, other people do it for us...we find ourselves frantically, at the last minute, trying to satisfy a half dozen different demands on our time, none of which is essential to our vocation, to stave off the disaster of disappointing someone." – Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*

Qualifications – 1 Timothy 3

- The gospel effect of deacons:

- Acts 6:7 – *"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."*
- 1 Timothy 3:14-16 – *"I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. 16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."* [Empty Tomb Photo]

- Deacons don't relieve pastors and elders of *all* care. But they do alleviate *much* of that burden. Otherwise, pastors primary responsibility – prayer and the preaching of God's word, along with the preparation to do so – will go neglected.
- Deacons, in essence, provide much-needed margin for pastors and elders.
- Deacons free pastors to work effectively toward the aim that Jesus would become the treasure of every human alive.
- Baggage on "behave": This isn't about acting right. This is about something far greater — the kind of community that God desires to emerge in our local church. And this community's behavior is supernatural. It is rooted in the life of Jesus. Our lives should "Amen!" Truth. We confess together the mystery of godliness (that's been revealed to the church): JESUS is the source of our godliness...Jesus who was manifested in a fleshly body, vindicated by the Spirit as legit when he was resurrected from the dead, seen by angels in heaven, preached to all ethnic groups, believed on by them, taken into glory.
- Deacons are models of serving *for everyone else in the church. (Their qualifications...)*
- If only the pastor serves, then, very likely, only the pastor will serve. (Sort of like how everyone thinks it's only the pastor's job to be kind, to hug people, to kiss babies, to visit hospitals, to make house calls...). But when ordinary members are serving, the rest of the church can be infected with the same other-centeredness.

This Church Needs To See You In Loving Action [Sky Diving Photo]

- We are all stewards of this church body.
- We are all responsible to cultivate a DNA of serving, humility, and devotion to truth.
- Without you, and only with me, our church is all talk. But with your ownership of these values, our church is transformed into a community of holiness that will, by its very existence, convict the world of sin, righteousness & judgment.