

Session 8

SERVE

Acts 6:1-7; I Corinthians 12:12-20

Memory Verse

“Brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty.”

– ACTS 6:3, CSB





Serve

THEOLOGICAL THEME: As the early church developed, the role of deacon was born. God made it clear that all believers are gifted to serve in some way or another. We each have the responsibility to identify the ways we have been gifted and use those gifts to serve the church and bring glory to God.

Everyone enjoys gifts. During a time with multiple gifts given and received such as Christmas, you may be grateful for every present you are given, but there are some that stand out more than others. Most of us know good gift givers. You look forward to opening presents from these people because they have good taste, know you well, or have a knack for picking out fun things. You can't wait to see what they wrapped because you know it will be special or life changing.

Think about the best gift you've received lately. If you were to only peek in the bag and look at the item but not take it out and use it, it wouldn't have the intended effect on your life. No one wants to learn the gift they spent time buying and wrapping for you is sitting on the shelf and not being used. For a gift to fulfill its purpose, it needs to be received and used. Today we are talking about gifts God has given to His children and how we are supposed to use those gifts for His glory.

 What is a favorite gift you've received? Who is the gift giver you love to open presents from? Why?

 How would you feel someone put away and never used a gift you put a lot of time and thought into?


Session Summary

As the early church grew, changes were needed so that the needs of the whole body would be met. This is when the role of deacon was established. To help carry out the mission of the church and not allow areas of need to go unmet, several men were chosen to be deacons to serve the body and further glorify God.

These deacons were men gifted in different ways who were able to help carry the burden of the church. This shift enabled the apostles to continue serving in their primary ministry calling of teaching the Word. God has uniquely gifted His children for various areas of service. For the church to function at its best, each person should be serving in his or her area of giftedness. When believers know the ways they are gifted, they can serve most effectively and bring glory to the Lord.

1. The Need for Deacons (Acts 6:1-4)

As the early church grew and more members were added to the body, needs arose that had to be addressed for the ministry of the church to continue. The description of two types of Jews could have been about the native languages each spoke. As the body of Christ becomes more diverse, with people from different backgrounds and experiences, the needs of the body will also be more diverse. In this case, a complaint arose over the treatment of some of the widows. Because the church made it a point to generously take care of each other, this situation needed attention. The distribution of provisions was an important part of daily life. The imbalance was likely due to how rapidly the church grew and changed, so they needed further delegation and division of labor.

 Why is change a healthy thing for a growing church? What happens to a church if it grows in number but never changes its methods of ministry to accommodate the larger number of people?

Change is not bad. Churches are living, growing, bodies of believers. As churches grow and people join their ranks, they have to make changes to continue with the mission. The disciples gathered all the people together and brought up the challenge they faced.

Note that they didn't ignore the issue and hope it would go away. They addressed it wisely and proposed some other leaders be chosen to focus on that issue alone.

The apostles recognized the importance of the strengths and giftedness of each person. They knew they had been specifically tasked with preaching and teaching. If they took time away from that calling to deal with daily provision, they would not be fulfilling the call of Jesus on their lives as effectively. These men knew they couldn't do everything themselves, so they looked for help. This is a necessary step in all churches that requires humility and wisdom.

This is the first example we read of the church dividing up roles of service according to gifts and abilities. Just because the disciples felt called to stay focused on preaching and teaching didn't mean they thought the other areas of service were not as important. It was all about each person serving where he or she could be most effective in the ways that God had gifted him or her.


? How did the apostles' actions show they believed every area of service in the church was important and not only certain ones?

In choosing seven others to lead in the distribution ministry, the apostles showed how seriously each role should be taken. They did not choose random people to lead but looked for specific standards of character and reputation in these leaders. Every ministry of the church is important, and certain standards can be determined for various types of service roles. This approach allows leaders to serve where they can have the most impact and most glorify God.

? Application: How have your thoughts about serving in the church been challenged or changed over the years? Why is it important that everyone in the church serve in some way?


2. The Selection of Deacons (Acts 6:5-7)

What the apostles proposed was received well by the body and the seven men chosen established the role of deacon. These men were responsible for the practical, daily, activities of the church. They took this burden off the shoulders of the apostles so that they could continue spreading the gospel through preaching the Word. Imagine what would happen if the apostles had become completely focused on dividing up food and making lists of who received their allotment each day. The provision distribution was important, but that doesn't mean the pastors of the church were to be the ones taking care of it.

 Why is it valuable and necessary for the whole body to help shoulder the burdens of the church alongside the pastors? What happens if we fail to do this?

Once Stephen and six other men were chosen according to their specifications, the apostles laid hands on them and in commissioned them for the service of the ministry. There is nothing magical about laying hands on someone, but it does carry significance. In the church, it is a sign of commissioning. It represents the way someone is called out to a particular ministry and shows that they are set apart for a role. The laying on of hands commits those individuals into the care and trust of God for His service. These seven men were set apart and became the first deacons of the Christian church.

It is also worth noting that these men were recognized before the whole body as the designated leaders in this area. Because the apostles took leadership in appointing them and choosing men with certain characteristics, it validated their new roles of leadership. Where there is a void of leadership, those who have selfish agendas and an abundance of pride can easily step in and take over. In taking the time to appoint these men and pray over them, the apostles transferred the authority and respect they needed to carry out their new tasks.

 Why was it important that these seven men be recognized and commissioned by the apostles?

Stephen and the other six men took their new role seriously and approached it as an opportunity to serve the Lord as they served His people. Too often in today's churches, people look for a platform or spotlight when the best way to serve and use your giftedness can often be behind the scenes or handing out food. Every position of service in the church is important because we all work together to keep the body of Christ healthy and growing.

We see the result of the apostles' bringing others into leadership with them—the church flourished. More people heard the Word preached and the number of Christ followers multiplied greatly. Scripture even tells us several priests chose to believe! There is no limit to what God can do through His followers when they stay focused on using their gifts to fulfill the work of the church together.

? Application: What is God calling you to do to help shoulder the burdens of our church? Where might He be calling you to serve in a way that may be overlooked by others?

3. The Gifts of the Body (1 Corinthians 12:12-20)

In this passage, the apostle Paul wrote about the way believers are gifted and how those gifts all work together. To keep us from being competitive about our gifts or thinking of one type of giftedness as being above the others, he used the image of many parts working in one body. This emphasizes the unity we should strive for as the body of Christ in the local church.

? How does unity (or disunity) in the body affect the way the church functions as a whole?

Paul took the illustration of one body into more detail as he compared different giftings of the Spirit with different parts of the human body. Where there are groups of people there is always opportunity for comparison to arise and if left unchecked, this will result in division.

The goal is never to rank giftedness as more important or less important. Paul stressed that just as every part of the body is valuable and important, every type of giftedness is also important and valuable. It is not just that each part is important and not ranked by value, but also that each part of the body works better when we work together. We all need and depend on each other to function and wishing to be a different part is counterproductive to the mission of the Lord.

? Why is it important to recognize the value of every part of the body and not seek to elevate certain gifts over others?

Some people are called to lead from a platform or stage. Others are gifted to organize the logistics of the building, while others invest in encouraging and supporting people. If you look around our church on any given Sunday, you will see various roles being carried out by people with different gifts and abilities. For the church to function properly, every one of those roles need to happen. The ear is not more important than the foot and another member of the body of Christ is not more important than you. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you have been gifted to serve and build up the body. It is the responsibility of each person to discover their giftedness and put it to work in serving.


? Application: Where have you had a wrong view of the gifts of the church in the past? How can you walk more in line with Paul's description from 1 Corinthians 12?


Conclusion


The early church set an example of how to handle necessary changes in the body. When discord arose over distributing provisions, the apostles gathered the people and made a plan to take care of the issue. Because the church was growing rapidly, adjustments needed to take place. Instead of trying to deal with those details themselves, the apostles recognized that they needed more help.

They chose seven others to step up and help manage some of the daily tasks so that they could continue serving where they were most gifted. The apostles would continue preaching and teaching with boldness. This example points to the importance of each person's gifts and abilities to serve the body. We have been given different gifts, but each one is important to the body of Christ.

Paul described the church as one body with every person being a valuable part. Just as the body works together to function, so the church needs every member to work together without being distracted by comparison and jealousy. No one gift is considered more valuable or desirable than another. Each believer must seek to discover his or her own gifts then put them to practice serving the church for the body to function most effectively.

 What did you learn today about gifts and abilities of believers?

 How have you been guilty of comparing or coveting another person's giftedness? How has the Lord spoken to you about that today?

 Do you know how the Lord has gifted you? If not, consider taking this assessment: shorturl.at/cdNX5. How might you seek to use your gifts in our church body?

Here's How to Become a Christ-Follower:

Read the following verses and ask after each one: "What does this say to me?"

- **All have sinned:** Romans 3:23 & 1 John 1:8
- **The wages of sin:** Romans 6:23 & John 3:18
- **But while we were sinners, salvation was provided:** Romans 5:8
- **Become a Christ-follower:** Romans 10:9-10 Confess and Believe

Accepting Christ is Just the Beginning:

Next Steps:

- Publicly profess your faith by being baptized (Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 3:21; Romans 6:4).
- Join a church which follows the Bible, where you can grow in your faith through prayer, Bible study and fellowship with other Christians.
- Get involved in groups for encouragement and accountability.
- Begin a daily personal worship experience with God where you study the Bible and pray.
- Share with others what Jesus has done for you. Tell your story (Romans 10:14; Matthew 28:19-20).
- Begin to live for God (Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; James 1:19-27).



FOR NEXT WEEK

Unity in Diversity

Main Passages

- Acts 8:26-40

Session Outline

1. The Right Place (Acts 8:26-28)
2. The Right Time (Acts 8:29-35)
3. The Right Result (Acts 8:36-40)

Memorize

“Brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty.”

- Acts 6:3, CSB