

# Serve

## *March 26, 2023*

### Lesson Summary

#### ***Main Passages***

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

#### ***Session Outline***

1. The Need for Deacons (Acts 6:1-4)
2. The Selection of Deacons (Acts 6:5-7)
3. The Gifts of the Body (1 Corinthians 12:12-20)

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#### ***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.



## Leader Guide

# Serve

### Introduction

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 one of your favorite gifts you've received? Who is the gift giver you love to open presents from? Why?
- ❓ How would you feel if someone put away the gift you gave them and never used it?


### 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?

### Men of Good Reputation


These were not just people who looked as though they might be effective or who signed up as volunteers. The first essential qualification required that they be known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. How often we reverse that in our day. We select officers or teachers for various aspects of church ministry and hope they will grow into the task. Not so here. The candidates not only possessed the qualities desired; those qualities had to be obvious to the total congregation!

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 everyone to use their gifts to serve the church? 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: Where is God calling you to use your gifts? Where might He be calling you to serve in a way that may be overlooked by others?

Find ways to use your gifts/serve at: [brentwood.church/service-opportunity-finder/](http://brentwood.church/service-opportunity-finder/)


### 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: Do you know your gifts? Ask others what they see in you. Consider a gift study like "Spiritual Gifts" by Thomas Schreiner.

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

## Prayer of Response

*Thank the Lord for saving you and gifting you through His Holy Spirit. Ask for wisdom to know your unique gifts and talents and direction on how to best put them to use in serving the church today.*

## Additional Resources

- *Spiritual Gifts* by Dan Darling
- *Be Dynamic* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Acts* by Charles Swindoll

## Disciples Multiplying Disciples



### Questions to Guide Your Group's Discussion

1. What does this passage say?
2. What did this passage mean to its original audience?
3. What does this passage tell us about God?
4. What does this passage tell us about man?
5. What does this passage demand of me?
6. How does this passage change the way I relate to people? (*How can you use this information this week at work or with friends and neighbors?*)
7. How does this passage prompt me to pray to God?

\*Adapted from Seven Arrows by Matt Rogers pastor of The Church at Cherrydale, Greenville, SC

### DxD This Week

#### **Call to Action**

Encourage your group to discover their gifts, personalities, and calling to faithfully serve in God's family.

Consider using this assessment to discover how the Lord has gifted you: [shorturl.at/cdNX5](http://shorturl.at/cdNX5)

You can find ways to use your gifts/serve at: [brentwood.church/service-opportunity-finder/](http://brentwood.church/service-opportunity-finder/)



## For Next Week

### Session Title

- 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

# Historical Context of Acts

## Purpose

The book of Acts emphasizes the work of God through the Holy Spirit in the lives of people who devoted themselves to Jesus Christ, especially Paul as he led the Gentile missionary endeavor. It is no exaggeration to say that the Christian church was built through the dynamic power of the Spirit working through chosen vessels. Another important concept is the radial spread of the gospel from Jews to Gentiles, from Jerusalem to Judea, from Samaria and on to the rest of the world (1:8). Thus Christianity transformed from being a sect within Judaism to a world religion that eventually gained acceptance everywhere, even in the heart of the pagan Roman Empire: Rome itself.

## Author

The book of Acts is formally anonymous. The traditional view is that the author was the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke—Luke the physician and traveling companion of Paul (Col 4:14; 2Tm 4:11; Phm 24). As early as the second century AD, church leaders such as Irenaeus wrote that Luke was the author of Acts. Irenaeus based his view on the “we” passages in Acts, five sections where the author changes from the third person (“he/she” and “they”) to first-person plural (“we”) as he narrates the action (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–29; 28:1–16). Irenaeus and many scholars since his time have interpreted these passages to mean that the author of Acts was one of the eyewitness companions of Paul. Luke fits this description better than any other candidate, especially given the similar themes between the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

## Setting

The date of composition of the book of Acts is to a large extent directly tied to the issue of authorship. A number of scholars have argued that Acts should be dated to the early 60s (at the time of Paul’s imprisonment). Acts closes with Paul still in prison in Rome (28:30–31). Although it is possible that Luke wrote at a later date, a time when Paul had been released, it is more plausible to think that he completed this book while Paul was still in prison. Otherwise he would have ended the book by telling about Paul’s release.

## Special Features

The book of Acts provides a glimpse into the first three decades of the early church (ca AD 30–63) as it spread and multiplied after the ascension of Jesus Christ. It is not a detailed or comprehensive history. Rather, it focuses on the role played by apostles such as Peter, who ministered primarily to Jews, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

## Extended Commentary

### Acts 6:1-7

6:1 The distinction between Hellenistic and Hebraic Jews probably refers to their respective languages. Many Jews whose primary language was Greek were converted to Christianity (e.g., Paul, Ac 9; see note at 22:3). Needy Hellenistic believers felt they had been neglected in the early church's charity distribution. This imbalance may have arisen due simply to the logistical challenge caused by the rapid addition of Hellenistic Jewish Christians. The existing church structure proved unable to meet the growing demands. It was time for change.

6:2–4 The distinction between those responsible for preaching and those responsible for distribution of food marks the beginning of functional distinction of roles and responsibilities in the early church. The apostles (the Twelve) believed prayer and preaching were their primary duties. It is not that other roles were unimportant. In fact, the high requirements (good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom) that had to be met by the seven men who would take over the duty of food distribution signals the importance of all roles in Christian service. Each of the “seven men” filled a position that later came to be reserved for deacons. Informally, therefore, these men were the first Christian deacons. They were responsible for the practical needs of the congregation.

6:5–6 Stephen and six others (their Greek names probably identify them as Hellenistic believers) were selected. They were set apart for service by prayer and the laying on of hands by the apostles. The laying on of hands occurs in several contexts in Acts (8:17; 13:3; 19:6). Here, as in 13:3, it indicated the church's recognition that God had called these people to a particular ministry. The ministry of Philip is highlighted in 8:4–13, 26–40.

6:7 The word of God spread, and the disciples increased greatly in number in the early church. Even a large group of priests became followers of Christ. Luke did not specify who the priests were, but they were probably those who performed duties in connection with worship at the temple. This put them in a good position to hear the apostles preach on a regular basis.<sup>1</sup>

### 1 Corinthians 12:12-20

12:12 Christ is compressed language for “the body of Christ,” the church (cp. vv. 27–28).

12:13 Through the work of the one Spirit, individual believers become identified as one body of Christ (i.e., as the unified church). All believers are baptized into one body and are given one Spirit to drink.

12:14–20 Paul tackles the problem of self-deprecation for believers who view themselves as less useful to the corporate body.

12:15–16 Paul personified body parts as speakers to express the absurdity of envy and self-deprecation among members of the physical human body. Some Corinthians apparently fell into

grading the gifts, attaching importance to public, showy gifts (such as the gift of utterance), and relative unimportance to less observable gifts.

12:17 A body reduced to just one member would be grotesque and useless.

12:18 The dispersion and diversification of gifts is no accident. God himself has given them just as he wanted.

12:19–20 Many parts, but one body encapsulates our identity as individuals enfolded into the corporate body of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

## References

1. *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
2. *Ibid.*

## Author Bio

### Dan Darling (Spiritual Gifts)

Daniel Darling is an author, pastor, and leader. He is the director of the Land Center for Cultural Engagement at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dan is a bestselling author of several books, including *The Original Jesus*, *The Dignity Revolution*, *The Characters of Christmas*, *The Characters of Easter*, *The Characters of Creation*, *A Way With Words*, and a children's book, *The Biggest Best Light*. He is the general editor of a small group study on racial reconciliation, *The Church and the Racial Divide*, author of a Bible study on spiritual gifts, and a contributor to *The Worldview Study Bible*.

### Warren Wiersbe (Be Dynamic)

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church and general director of *Back to the Bible*, has traveled widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker. Because of his encouragement to those in ministry, Dr. Wiersbe is often referred to as “the pastor’s pastor.” He has ministered in churches and conferences throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Central and South America, and Europe. Dr. Wiersbe has written over 150 books, including the popular BE series of commentaries on every book of the Bible, which has sold more than four million copies. At the 2002 Christian Booksellers Convention, he was awarded the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

### Charles Swindoll (Acts)

Charles R. Swindoll is the founder and senior pastor–teacher of Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas. But Chuck’s listening audience extends far beyond a local church body, as *Insight for Living* airs on major Christian radio markets around the world. Chuck’s extensive writing ministry has also served the body of Christ worldwide, and his leadership as president and now chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary has helped prepare and equip a new generation of men and women for ministry. Chuck and his wife, Cynthia, his partner in life and ministry, have four grown children, ten grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.