

Seven Men are Chosen to Minister

(Acts 6:1-7)

Pre-Session Warm Up

Are you still growing? Having a body that is growing and becoming stronger is a good thing. Can you think of anything that might be negative about growing? [Allow students to think about this and respond.] Have any of you ever had growing pains? They can hurt!

While growing is a good thing what happens when you outgrow your favorite clothes or shoes? It is kind of sad to have to give them away or take them to Goodwill. But it can be fun to go shopping for new things!

We have been learning about the early church from the Book of Acts. As the Good News about Jesus was being preached in Jerusalem many people were being saved. Each time a person is saved, the Church (or family of believers) grows. Just like your growing body, a growing Church is a good thing, but there can be some problems, too. The Body of Christ doesn't have the same problem of outgrowing clothes or shoes, but does face other problems as a result of growth.

Opening Prayer

Father, today we will learn that seven men of good character were chosen to help solve a big problem in the early church. We want to be useful to You in our church, too. So, help us to listen so we will know what character traits we need to develop so that we can be chosen for the work of the Kingdom of God. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Memory Verse

As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:10)

Lesson

Before we get into our lesson for today, let's refresh our memories about what has been happening so far in our study of the book of Acts. [Teacher, allow students to share what they remember, prompt them with some of the highlights of the last six lessons.]

Last time we left off with chapter 5 verse 42.

Acts 5:42

And every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: "Jesus is the Messiah."

The church had been growing very quickly and it was having growing pains.

Acts 6:1

But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.

Up until now Satan had been attacking the church from the outside. Remember the Jewish religious leaders were trying to stop the apostles from teaching and preaching Jesus. Here we see that Satan is now attacking the church body from within, trying to get fellow believers to argue and fight against each other. Satan will try to do anything and everything to disgrace the church.

There were two groups of people coming to faith: Greek-speaking believers and Hebrew-speaking believers. Greek-speaking believers were mostly from all over the Roman Empire. The Hebrew-speaking believers were mostly from Judea. [Teacher, point these areas out on the map.]

The Hebrew-speaking believers tried to keep the customs and traditions of the Jewish culture while the Greek-speaking believers lived outside of Jerusalem and did not even speak the Hebrew language, they spoke Greek.

In verse 1 we see that both groups had widows. What is a widow? (A woman whose husband died.) In those days most women were

not able to have jobs, so they could not earn money to live on. They were depending on having a husband to care for them. Without a husband, other people had to take care of them. God's people knew it was important to make sure the widows' needs were met.

In our passage today the Greek-speaking believers felt like their widows were not being taken care of as well as the Hebrew-speaking believers. So, they began to complain that their widows were being passed over in the daily distribution of food.

It is likely that the widows were not intentionally overlooked. But because of the language barrier, it was more difficult to know what their needs were. At any rate, Satan loves to use any excuse to begin a church-splitting conflict. He caused the two groups to be jealous of each other which causes bitterness and anger.

When the apostles heard that there was a problem, they wanted to take care of it right away. They gathered the believers together and came up with a solution to the problem.

Acts 6:2

So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, "We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program."

Each person in the family of God has a job to do. The apostles were called to teach the word of God. If they were to run a food program for the widows, that would take them away from studying God's word, praying and preparing their teachings.

The Holy Spirit gave the apostles great wisdom to know how to deal with this problem. They told the believers to choose seven men to help. They weren't to choose just anyone. They were to look for certain character traits in these men.

Acts 6:3-4

*And so, brothers, select seven men who are **well respected** and are **full of the Spirit and wisdom**. We will give them this responsibility. Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word."*

What character traits were they to look for? They needed to be well respected and full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

Why do you think it would be important for God's servants to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom? They needed men of good character because they would have an important responsibility. They would be collecting money from some believers and giving it to the widows. They needed wisdom to know how best to serve these women in a way that pleased God.

What the apostles said to do was pleasing to all the believers. So, they prayed and asked the Holy Spirit to show them which men to choose.

Acts 6:5-6

*Everyone liked this idea, and they chose the following: **Stephen** (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (an earlier convert to the Jewish faith). (6) These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them.*

Most people believe that these seven men were the very first deacons to serve in the early church. The deacon's job was to serve Jesus by helping people in the church who had needs. If someone was hungry, they made sure the person got food. If someone needed clothes, they made sure they had money to buy clothes. These men served the Body of Christ, the family of believers, by helping others and allowing the apostles to do the very important job of teaching God's word to others.

Because the apostles took care of the situation immediately, the widows in the church were taken care of, the conflict among the believers stopped, and God's work continued without interruption.

Acts 6:7

So God's message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too.

The church continued to grow; even some of the Jewish priests came to faith in Jesus!

Like I said, each person in the family of God has a job to do. The apostles were to take care of people's spiritual needs; the deacons were to take care of people's physical needs. When everyone is doing their job, God's work continues and others are saved and the Body of Christ continues to grow.

We have deacons in our church. Do you know how they serve the believers in our church? (Repair and maintenance on the building, mowing the lawn, cleaning the church, etc.) How does their job help the pastor focus on teaching and preaching God's word and prayer? If the pastor had to do everything in the church, he would not have enough time for studying God's Word and praying.

We each have a responsibility to serve other believers with the gifts and talents that God has given us. Can you think of ways you could serve others at our church? (Pick up trash, help in the nursery, help your Sunday school teacher setup or clean up after class, etc.)

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank You for the wisdom You gave the apostles to choose others to help them in their ministry of the word of God. We all want to be used by You to be a blessing to others here at church. Help us to desire to have the wonderful character that these first deacons had. They were well respected and full of the Holy Spirit and

wisdom. Encourage us to live our lives in a way that pleases You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Learning Centers

Game Center

Use the following questions in a game or discussion:

1. In what ways does Satan try to snuff out the church? (He causes enemies from the outside to come against Christians and he causes conflict within the church, among fellow believers.)
2. What is a widow and what problems did they have in Bible times? (A widow is a woman whose husband died. They would have no way to make a living to buy food and pay rent, etc.)
3. As the church in Jerusalem was growing, what problem came up? (Greek-speaking believers felt their widows were overlooked.)
4. What solution did the apostles come up with to solve the conflict between the Greek-speaking believers and the Hebrew-speaking believers? (They chose seven men to oversee the food distribution program.)
5. What character traits were they looking for in the men they chose to help care for the widows? (They needed to be men who were well respected full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.)
6. Why do you think it would be important for God's servants to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom? (They would have an important responsibility and needed wisdom to know how best to serve these women.)
7. What were the apostles supposed to be focused on and what were the deacons supposed to be focused on? (The apostles

were to take care of people's spiritual needs; the deacons were to take care of people's physical needs.)

8. How do deacons help a pastor focus on teaching and preaching God's word and prayer? (The pastor doesn't have to take the time to do what the deacons are called to do.)
9. How does verse 5 describe Stephen? (He was a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit.)
10. What was the result when they chose these seven men to help? (God's Word spread and many more people believed in Jesus.)
11. What is one way you could serve others at our church?