

8/14/22 - Acts 6:1-7 - "The Ministry of the Word"

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[0 : 00] It's a blessing to be back, and thank you. Hello, Brent. Thank you all for the break. I'm Pastor Rick. If I've not met you before, it's good to meet you.

And as I was saying, it was a very restful summer, not only physically restful and emotionally restful, but also spiritually restful. And so I truly appreciate the opportunity to rest.

But it is a blessing to be back here today to continue this study of Acts with you all. And, of course, I've been tuning into the messages and greatly enjoying this study.

It's one of my favorite books of the Bible, and so I look forward to looking in more detail at Acts 6, at least the first part of it today.

So I'm going to give a little bit of background before we jump into the text and then pray, but I've titled my sermon The Ministry of the Word, and that's a big focus of what we're going to talk about today.

[0 : 58] But I think this passage is both very practical, but also deals with a lot of what is the ministry of the church.

It not only deals with the organization of the church and its leadership, but it also deals with two major facets of our ministry as the church. It deals with the Word of God and also serving the poor.

And so that's what I want to look at today. I know it's quite a practical message, but I think it's also very beautiful to see how God has structured the body in this way.

But here at Steel Valley Church, if you're new or you've been here for a while, you know that we've organized our church following after the model set, not only in Acts, but clarified later in 1 Timothy 3.

And so we have elders. I myself am an elder or pastor. The word means the same thing in the Greek. And then also we have deacons. We have several deacons.

[1 : 54] And then we have members of the body or covenant partners, as we call them as well. And so this structure has more nuance. There's more to it than that. But essentially, that's how we've structured ourself after the biblical way that we perceive it.

And if you've gone through the Discover SVC course, you may know a little bit more about why we've structured ourself this way, the motivation behind it. And if you haven't, I encourage you to go through the Discover SVC course to learn more about not only the church, but its leadership and the role of each person within that.

But Acts 6, it gives us a glimpse of the early church and how the spirit motivated that organization, what was important about it. And I think it's important to clear up that from our perspective, nearly 2,000 years later, the idea of church leadership and organization has become rather contentious.

It varies a lot from church to church. And it also, in some people's minds, is unnecessary or in the way of the mission of the church. But I don't think the apostles saw it this way.

And I don't think we should either. I think a lot of the difficulties with church leadership have to do with, or rather the organization of the church, have to do with repeated failings of church leaders and church organizations, which have led to disagreement and even splitting of church bodies.

[3 : 20] And I think many of us here today have, at some point in the past, been hurt by church leadership, by failings of church leadership or church organization itself.

And unfortunately, this has given rise in the 20th, and particularly in the 21st century, of an ideology that maybe you've heard of, spiritual but not religious, this idea that we should separate from organized religion because of its past and current failures.

And it's very prevalent in Western churches today. Some churches have even been founded on this idea of a lack of organization or structure. And they see structure or organization as evil.

They see it as only leading to hypocrisy or corruption or abuse. And I think those are very real things that have happened within the church, particularly due to the failures of leaders.

But I don't think we should fault what the Spirit has inspired to be the organization of the church. I think we should see that leaders need to improve and to pursue what the Spirit has inspired and called us to do.

[4 : 34] And so this leads to an important question. And the aim of the message really today is how can biblical organization and leadership best serve the ministry of the body and the unity of the church?

And that's what I want to look at today. And I'm going to briefly go through what Acts has covered to get us to this point. But before we do, I want to take a moment just to pray over the message today.

So please pray with me. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the truth and the beauty that's found within it. We thank you for the opportunity to learn from your word, Lord, to submit ourselves to its authority.

And I pray that you will open our eyes and our hearts to see and understand and to be transformed by your image and conformed to the image of Christ. We thank you and pray this in your holy name.

Amen. So looking back at Acts, if you've been with us for this series, I'm sure you're quite familiar with all that's transpired in the first five books of Acts.

[5 : 35] But I want to briefly summarize it and to show how we got to Acts 6 and where the church is now. I think two important things that have taken place at this point is the sermon at Pentecost, where nearly 3,000 believers joined the church in a single day.

And then also the miracle of healing the lame man that happened in Acts 5, where nearly 5,000 more joined the church in seemingly a single day.

And so within two events, we've got over 8,000 people. And these are just two of the events that are recorded. It's probably more than 10,000 at this point. Some people estimate 20,000 to 30,000 people have joined the church at this point.

So we've gone from 12 apostles with perhaps 70 in total disciples to tens of thousands in the few pages of Acts. So the church is quite large at this point.

But not only has the church grown and we've seen great and mighty works of the Holy Spirit, the disciples have also faced some opposition in this growth.

[6 : 44] We've seen them beaten. We've seen them imprisoned. And we've seen the difficulties that they've faced as a church from the outside. And I just want to make clear that at this point, the church is primarily comprised of Jews.

At Pentecost, we had Jews from Jerusalem and also Jews from around the Greek region who were at Pentecost, heard the gospel, and believed. So the church is really comprised of primarily Jewish converts at this point.

And they're not just from Jerusalem. They're from the surrounding community. And so they're familiar with the organization of the Jewish religion. They're familiar with the priesthood, with the culture of Judaism, with its governance.

And this is what they've become familiar with. And they've even joined themselves to it. They're gathering in the temple at this point and also gathering sometimes after meeting at the temple in houses and together in smaller groups.

But primarily, they're meeting in the temple. And so there's really not a division at this point between the Christians and the Jews. The Christians still see themselves as a continuation of God's promise through the Jewish people.

[7 : 58] It's only later, actually, in the next chapter of Acts that we're going to see that they're driven out of the temple and Jerusalem and dispersed into Samaria and then the world. But for right now, they're still practicing their worship in the temple, continuing the fulfillment of God's promises to the people of Israel.

But despite the early believers' attempts to share the gospel message with their own people, with their brothers and sisters, they're rejected.

Their message is rejected by many and they're persecuted by them. And the high priests and Sadducees who feel threatened by these believers, by their church, really changing and shifting what has become the Jewish power and government structure at this point, they decide to try and kill at least the apostles to quell this uprising as they see it or perhaps to crush the entire church at this point.

And as Lex preached last week and we saw in Acts chapter 5, when the apostles were arrested and the Sadducees and high priests had an opportunity maybe to kill them in that very moment, one of them, Gamaliel, rose up and said, if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail.

But if it is of God, we will not be able to overthrow them. And the next verse in chapter 6, we see that the church multiplied.

[9 : 32] So clearly the Spirit is saying, no, this is not of man, this is of God. The church is going to continue to grow despite the high priest's best attempt to stop it.

And so now the church has continued to grow and there are many thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of them at this point, but the church really hasn't at least recorded in Acts faced any internal struggles at this point, right?

We saw Ananias and Sapphira's attempt to lie to the Holy Spirit and their death, which was a sign and a warning to the others among them. But other than that, we haven't really seen any internal issues or conflict arising.

But as the church is getting quite large, as naturally tends to happen, complaint arises among the body. And that's really how we get to Acts chapter 6 in these verses here, is this complaint that arose.

So let's start out by looking at just the first verse of Acts chapter 6. I can't pronounce Acts today. In verse 1, it says, 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.

[10 : 54] So before we move into the body of the text, I want to look at this context of what exactly this first verse is meant to bring to our minds.

And so there's really three things I want to highlight in this first verse, and that's the increasing number, the church is growing, the complaint by the Hellenists, and the daily distribution.

So first of all, the church is increasing in number. And this word increasing could also be translated as multiplied. And it's not used in Acts before this verse, but it's used quite a bit after this verse.

And I think Luke, in writing this, uses this word for a particular reason. And Stephen picks up on it in his sermon, as we'll see in Acts chapter 7 later on.

But we see that God is fulfilling his promise to the early church by increasing their number. Just as in the parable of the mustard seed, God took a small seed of 12 people and maybe 70 disciples with them and grew it into tens of thousands, like the mustard seed growing into a giant tree for the birds of the air to take rest in.

[12 : 06] Right? He has fulfilled his promise already to the church to grow it greatly. And the church continued to multiply, which I think made Stephen think back to Exodus in Stephen's sermon in Acts 7.

He explains that the people of God multiplied in Egypt. They were multiplied in Egypt before God sent them into the promised land. But here in the first verses of Acts 6, we see kind of the opposite taking place.

God is multiplying his new body of believers in Jerusalem in preparation to send them out into the world. And that's what the rest of the book of Acts is really going to be about, is sending them out into Samaria, which is just to the north of Israel, and then out into the rest of the world.

And I think that this serves really as a transition to show us the beginning of that taking place. But let's stay within our verses for today. Again, the rapid growth was not without difficulties.

And so, this verse is really about the internal difficulties that arose during that multiplying. Now, as I said earlier, the church was comprised of both Hellenist or Greek-speaking Jews from the dispersed region and also Hebrews or Aramaic-speaking Jews that were all living together within the church.

[13 : 31] So we have two different predominant languages taking place within the church. And this is a natural place for divide. We have different culture, different language, and one of them is feeling neglected, which rises to complaint and perhaps, if it was unmitigated, to a separation between them.

So it's quite a big issue. Specifically, the Hellenists were complaining because their widows were not receiving the daily distribution.

And we'll talk in a minute about what that means. But what I want to make clear is it's not really shown in Scripture if they were being neglected, if this was intentional or unintentional, if it was just a lack of resources or a lack of people to manage those resources.

But nonetheless, they were being neglected. And while this may seem like a fairly minor issue that they were being neglected and complaining, as I said, unresolved complaint can often increase and cause division.

So this complaint was no minor issue. And I also don't want you to be mistaken. The passage is not saying that the complaining was wrong. It's not wrong to complain.

[14 : 47] Now, yes, in the Old Testament, when people were complaining against God's providence in the wilderness, that was murmuring against God. But in this sense of complaining, it was a real problem that needed to be addressed.

And it wasn't wrong to bring up this problem. And the disciples and the apostles didn't treat it as being wrong. But although the apostles at this point, they don't have any experience dealing with complaint or internal struggles, they were guided by the Holy Spirit to make significant and also timely changes within the body to address this complaint and to address this issue.

And so I think we today can learn a lot from how they addressed this issue, how they addressed this complaint, because naturally within our churches, complaint is going to arise, people are going to feel neglected, and we need to address those complaints timely in a way that not only solves the problem, but makes sure that people are being served in the way that we're called to.

Before we move on, I want to clarify what was being neglected, right? We're told that the widows were not receiving their portion in the daily distribution.

So what was this daily distribution? Why was it important? Well, I think in these verses, we learn that the church was continuing the Old Testament practice of providing for the widows, the orphans, or the fatherless, as they're often called, and the sojourners in their land.

[16 : 17] This had been commanded of them back in Deuteronomy 18 and throughout the rest of Deuteronomy, and it was the expectation of Israel to provide for those in their midst who could not provide for themselves.

And so the church has taken this practice upon themselves. It's not that they're providing for everyone in the world around them. They're providing for those believers within the body. But they've set up a system whereby they can provide for them.

And the apostles, they deem this as a vital part of their ministry. We'll see that their ministry has two facets, but one of them is this provision for the widows specifically in their midst.

And I think this makes sense, right? If we look back at Psalm 68 5, what does it say? God is the father of the fatherless and protector of widows.

So clearly this is something that God feels strongly about and the church, therefore, should feel strongly about it as well. But more than this, when Israel was dispersed, when their nation was attacked by Babylon and dispersed into the surrounding countries, one of the main things that God indicted them for was their failure to provide for the widows, their injustice, the lack of righteousness among them.

[17 : 36] We see this in Ezekiel 22 and then in Jeremiah 7 as well. And so although the church is not Israel, there is a distinction. The apostles feel that it is still their call before God to provide for those in their midst.

And we see that the early church had all things in common. In Acts 2 and 4, we see that they were distributing food among themselves, not only to those within their body in need, but also specifically to widows and likely also to the fatherless and sojourners, although they're not specifically mentioned in this passage.

It's also not clear if they're distributing food or funds for food. We'll see in a minute that it could be either way, but regardless, their mission is to make sure that the widows among them are being fed.

And so caring for the widows was important to them. And also it didn't end here in Acts. If you look at 1 Timothy 5 and James 1.27, you'll see that this continued in the church as they spread out into the regions around them.

But here in Acts 2, the church has grown to the point where the apostles, they simply can't keep up with this demanding task of the daily distribution. For whatever practical reason, they couldn't keep up with the demand.

[19 : 03] It was too much of a demand for them specifically. And importantly, it was taking their attention off of proclaiming the word of God. And so seeing that the widows were neglected in hearing this complaint, the apostles stopped what they were doing.

And as we'll see in the next verse, they called the full number of the disciples together. I think this is pretty remarkable. You know, they have tens of thousands at this point and they decide to call everyone together for a meeting.

I don't know if it literally meant every member of the church, but that's the way that it reads. And so what seems like a relatively small complaint that maybe could have been addressed with minor changes was instead met by a full stop, followed by thoughtful, prayerful institution of new ministries within the growing body.

And so I think that is something we can learn a lot from in our own body and in the churches at large. But in my second point, which I've titled One Body, Many Members, I want to look at Acts 6-2.

And I apologize that I didn't give the title for the first point, but I think it was on the screen there, so hopefully you caught it. But the title of the first point was Growing Pains. The title of the second point is One Body, Many Members.

[20 : 18] But let's continue looking at the text in Acts chapter 2, or Acts 6, verse 2. It says, In 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.

And so as we said, they called the full number of the disciples together, and they not only institute change, but they give a defense for this change. They give a reason for it.

This calling the full number of the disciples together makes me think of the Old Testament when Israel was going to go to war or they were going to anoint a king.

They would call all the tribes together. We see this frequently in Joshua, Judges, Kings, and Samuel. And the apostles decided that this was a big enough change that they needed to call everyone together.

And so it merited gathering the entire congregation. And also they were called for the installation, right? They're going to install these new leaders and pray over them, and so that also merited gathering together.

[21 : 25] But before this, we see the apostles give a defense of why this new role was necessary. They say, It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.

And so not only do they install new leaders who won't look exactly like them, but they also give a defense of why they saw their calling, their mission, important enough to give this calling to another group.

And they also tell us that their calling was preaching the word of God and prayer, right? It doesn't say specifically in this verse that it's prayer, but in verse 4 it says prayer as well.

And so I want to clear up a couple of points. First of all, it's important to understand what this phrase serving tables means.

And I could try to say it in Greek, but that's not my strong suit. So we'll see that this idea of tables is used in multiple places in scripture.

[22 : 34] And it can mean literally serving tables, like setting up tables, putting food on the table and people coming and eating the food or more likely taking the food with them back to their house.

But it can also mean as it's used in Luke 19.23 as the table of the money changer or a banker. And so it could just as likely mean that serving tables was acting in the role of a banker where the widow comes to the table and says, I need money for the next seven days.

Can I have money? And the person sitting at the table gives them the daily distribution, however much they would need, however much was appropriate. And so this was more of a managerial role in stewarding and managing resources.

And several commentators say that this is perhaps a better understanding of the word. But either way, serving tables, whether it was literally serving food or distributing funds, was taking the apostles' attention from preaching and teaching, right?

So the second thing I want to point out is that the apostles didn't see caring for widows or literally serving tables as inferior to preaching the word.

[23 : 48] On first reading, it may seem that that's what they were saying, that we've got a better thing to do than serve tables, so we're going to leave it to someone else. But I don't think that was their intention. Instead, they recognized that their calling is first and foremost to proclaim the word of God, and someone else in their midst may be better qualified and called to this specific task of serving tables.

We can think about maybe 1 Corinthians 12, 27, right? And I'm going to paraphrase it, but I think they may have it on the screen, and you can also, I encourage you to look at it in your Bible.

Paul says, the body of Christ is comprised of many members with various gifts. Some are gifted to be apostles, some prophets, others teachers, some to healing, some to helping, and some to administrating.

And so, just as Paul understood, the apostles understood that their calling, their gifting, prepared them for the ministry of the word, and others among them were better prepared for this ministry of serving tables.

apostles. The apostles had this foremost call to the ministry of the word. If you remember back in Acts 4, 20, they said, in defense of themselves, we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

[25 : 13] They believed that, like Paul, the gospel is the power of God for salvation to the Jew first and also to the Greeks. they saw their utmost call as the proclamation of the word of God and that's what they had dedicated themselves to.

Paul gives us insight of this calling in and throughout his letters but particularly in 1 Corinthians and we see in his defense of his ministry that this work of preaching and teaching, it consumed all of his time, his energy, and his resources and he had devoted his life to preaching and to praying as we'll see in several places but Paul saw this call to preaching particularly in 1 Corinthians 9, 17 as the necessity that was laid upon him which he could not forsake and a stewardship that was entrusted to him and to others who were called to the proclamation of the word of God.

And so the apostles, they feel this weight of necessity regarding their call. Their call is the proclamation of the word of God and more than that, Christ commanded them directly in Luke 22 and 24 that the repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in the name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.

Right? This was what Christ had commanded them to do and so this was their highest calling. And I also want to point out that this calling, at least parts of it, didn't end with the apostles.

It was passed down to what became the elders. This calling was passed to the elders, the preachers, the teachers. Right? And it was passed on to them within the dispersion as churches arose in the communities around.

[27 : 09] Elders were installed and appointed to or called to this mission of preaching and teaching. They were also called to shepherding and overseeing the flock or setting the direction for the body, for praying for the sick, also for reproof, rebuking, and exhorting, and then of course refuting unsound doctrine.

And although their call is unique from the apostles, the apostles were called to be the foundation or at least to set the foundation of the church whereas apostles are really called or elders are called to build upon that foundation, the role of elder is nonetheless carried with the same weight, the same necessity that the apostles carried.

And so I think it's far from an easy ministry and I don't mean to stand up here and grandstand about how difficult my job of elder is. I'm a lay elder and the responsibilities of a lay elder are quite different from those of someone who's called to full-time ministry.

But the pastorate is a difficult job just as it was for the apostles, right? It's comprised of much more than simply standing in front of the pulpit for an hour on Sunday and proclaiming the word of God.

It's living the word of God. It's devoted prayer. It's the responsibility of caring for the flock, of answering for them before God, right? It's a great responsibility and it's a stressful job.

[28 : 48] And it was the same for the apostles. They were overwhelmed by this job of the ministry of the word and so they were seeking help. They were seeking to share some of that load with those around them to make the job easier.

Before we move on, I want to point something out that a recent survey posted in March of this year, they surveyed, I think, 511 pastors and they found in this survey that 42% of these full-time pastors had given real serious consideration to quitting being in full-time ministry within the last year.

And they said it was because of the immense stress of the job, at least the majority of them. I think this is a sobering reality that really helps us to see behind the scenes of what this job really looked like, not only for elders but for the apostles before them.

And so it's important to note what keeps these devoted apostles and after them, elders, going despite the immense stress of their job. And I'm sure we could list many reasons, but I think a few of the most crucial ones that I want to point out today are, of course, a life of devoted prayer and faith in God's providence.

Also, a sense of stewardship just as Paul before them and the necessity laid upon them by the Holy Spirit that keeps them from abandoning this calling. Moreover, being supported and honored by the church, Paul calls us in 1 Corinthians 9 and 1 Timothy 4 to support and honor, even a double honor, upon those who devote themselves to the ministry of the word.

[30 : 41] But here in Acts, we see that it's also being surrounded by devoted disciples of good repute, full of spirit and of wisdom. And that's really what we get from Acts 6, 1 through 7 is this mission, this ministry of the word is not possible without the devoted service of those who surround those who proclaim the word.

And so elders today, just as the apostles before them, they must be surrounded first by a plurality of elders, also by deacons and by faithful members in order to continue the ministry of the word while maintaining the unity of the body and making sure that the needs of the body are managed well.

But lest we spend too much time talking about elders now, we'll turn our attention to Acts 6, 3 through 4. As we continue, the apostles say, 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, but we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

A lot more information packed into these few verses. First of all, notice that the apostles didn't simply appoint seven people to act in this role.

Instead, they told the people to choose seven from among themselves. This is a really important key point here.

[32 : 19] This reminds me, actually, of Numbers 11, 14. I like to jump around the Bible a bit. But it reminded me of when Moses said, I'm not able to carry all this people, all of Israel, millions of people, alone.

The burden is too heavy for me. And then the Lord said to Moses, gather for me 70 men of the elders of Israel who you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them.

And while that passage is talking specifically about elders among them, it has the same idea that these elders are chosen from among the people and are already serving in a role which makes them stand out as being overseers and as having the respect of the people.

And the apostles, they follow in this wisdom. They see that if they're going to appoint leaders who are going to be effective among the body, these people must already have the respect of those they aim to serve and the trust of them.

And the apostles, they give more than this one qualification that they're from among the body. They give in total five qualifications. The first, as we just mentioned, was that they were from among the body and more specifically, they were actually to be from among the Hellenists.

[33 : 35] The group that was being neglected and complaining was the one from which they chose these seven. In this case, they were also specifically men. The Greek word makes clear that it literally meant men.

They were to be of good reputation, they were to be full of spirit, and they were to be full of wisdom. So something we can note about these qualifications is this isn't something you would post on a job description for someone who's going to be a waiter, right?

Why would you call for wisdom in being full of the spirit if you're looking for someone who's going to literally wait tables? Not that those aren't good qualifications and wouldn't be a great thing for waiters, but these are qualifications for people who are going to serve and fill a specific role that called for not only discernment but wisdom in what they did.

And I think these original qualifications inspired Paul later in 1 Timothy 3 when he gave the qualifications for deacons, right? Paul gave the qualifications that these leaders should be respectable or dignified, have the respect of the people they serve and also the community around them, and that they should be known and tested by those within their care.

And so I think this expectation continues in the body. Now, how do we get to deacons? Well, it's commonly held that these seven were the original deacons.

[35 : 07] Why is this the case? Well, the word to serve in the Greek, I'm going to try and pronounce it diakonos, gives rise to the word deacons, right?

The literal word for serve, which in its original context meant to serve the poor and to minister to the needy, became the term for deacon.

And so it's literally those who serve and minister to the poor. And this same term was later adopted by Paul when he spelled out in 1 Timothy what the leaders of the church would look like, elders and then deacons.

However, we must be careful that these seven here in Acts 6, they're never specifically called deacons, and their role was a little bit different than what became deacons. But nonetheless, they exemplified this ministry of serving, which inspired the name and office of deacon and also deaconess.

And notice that the seven supported the apostles through a specific task of administering the daily distribution, a major undertaking that required their service, their wisdom, and also discernment to make sure that the limited resources were stewarded well to meet the needs of the widows and to avoid complaint.

[36 : 28] A couple more points I want to make about deacons before we move on in the text. First, we need to avoid the mindset that supporting roles are inferior to more honorable ones.

I think this is pervasive within our culture. But it makes me think, a couple of years ago, I don't know if you remember, I think it was 2019, that the federal government ran out of funds and they decided to close down the federal government, whatever that means.

They were closed down for like 35 days and probably most of you didn't notice. Maybe you did, but most of you probably didn't notice. But a few times in history, at least in the Americas, garbage collectors have gone on strike.

It has never lasted more than nine days. Right? So who's really more essential to life as we know it?

Right? Sorry, my emotions get to me sometimes. But I don't mean to compare Tom or Christine or Jeff to garbage collectors or Brent to the federal government.

[37 : 40] Sorry, Brent. But I hope you get the point, right? There are no inferior roles, neither in our culture or in the church.

And so no matter how important the role of the apostles was to the ministry of the word, this ministry would be ineffective without the faithful service of the seven or later deacons.

And moreover, if they neglected this service, new disciples are not going to align themselves to a church that grandstands and proclaims the word, but then fails to apply it in real discipleship, in real service, and in real love.

And so I don't think we should have this sentiment among us that one role is more honorable or more indispensable than another.

Paul talks specifically about the members of the body in 1 Corinthians 12, 21 through 26, and this is a bit of a long passage, but I think it really gets the point across.

[38 : 50] Paul says, the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you, nor again can the hand, or rather the head to the feet say, I have no need of you. On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.

Skipping down to verse 25, he says, but God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.

If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together. God has composed the body, our body, so that every member is indispensable to the ministry of the church and the ministry of the word.

And I want to take a moment to point out the indispensable members of our body who often work in the background, and rarely get a thanks for the work that they do.

But there are many, right, within our body. There are the deacons, those who volunteer and serve, who work tirelessly in the background, giving from their own time and resources to make the ministry of this body possible, to serve the body itself, and to further the ministry of the word of God.

[40 : 12] And so I think we need to make an effort. Remember, we gather together to encourage one another, as Hebrews 10 says. And so in encouraging one another, we also must remember to thank those who serve.

There are many, many who serve this body. And so I also want to point out that deacons, like elders, like all of us, are called to follow this ministry of serving that Christ exemplified for us.

Remember, Jesus, on the Last Supper, he was the one who broke the bread. He was the one who served the table to his disciples. He was the one who, he said in Luke 22, 27, I am among you as the one who serves.

Right? When the apostles were arguing about who was the greatest among them, he closed down that argument by saying, no, it's the one who serves who gets the greater honor. He also washed their feet, right?

Even a task such as this was not beneath Jesus. He was so devoted to this ministry of service that he washed the disciples' feet as a sign of his cleansing them, but also as a sign of sending them out into the world.

[41 : 32] And so the deacons and elders, along with all the members, we must strive to follow Jesus' example, two separate words, of servant leadership if the body is to continue growing.

And one more point before we move on, the relationship between the apostles and the seven directly informs the relationship between the elders and the deacons, right?

Or deaconess. The role of deacon is one which directly supports the ministry of the word and also the ministry of the elders. Deacons continue this mission of serving and caring for, in most cases, the physical and practical needs of the congregation.

And while it may look like a million things in different churches, we can kind of sum them up in four specific roles that deacons hold.

They serve the body by ministering to the poor and the sick, just as the original deacons did. They minister to the poor and the sick. They also tend to complain, just as the original seven helped to avert the complaint and the service of the body.

[42 : 42] Deacons continue to tend to complaints and provide solutions that bring about unity within the body. They act in the gap, right? They steward the resources of the church.

That also means making important decisions about how much to use for each ministry and also how much to give to those in need who come to the church or who come in the body that are in need.

How much do we give? How do we steward our resources well? And of course, they support the ministry of the word by freeing up the elders to continue devoting themselves to teaching, to preaching, and to praying.

And one final caveat before we move on. The roles of deacon and elder are distinct, and they're defined in scripture, and they're called to different service within the body, but that never excludes me from helping fix the live stream, or cleaning toilets, or emptying trash cans, right?

Neither does it exclude the deacons from ministering the word, from discipling those within the body, from evangelizing and proclaiming the word. And it also doesn't exclude the members of the body from any of those ministries as well.

[44 : 00] There are different roles in order to have organization within the body, people from serving in ways that continue this mission.

I think Stephen and Philip, as we'll see in the rest of Acts 6, 7, and 8, they both go on to preach and proclaim the word. They also perform signs and wonders.

They may be the original deacons as they've come to be known, but they proclaim the word of God powerfully, and Stephen is even martyred for it. Look out, ah, deacons. But I think the point is important that just because we have people who fill roles, who are qualified, called, and gifted for that role doesn't mean that others cannot support that role in whatever way they're gifted and called.

But the point is this. Cool. By faithfully serving in the roles where each is uniquely gifted and called, others are free to do the same, and the body of Christ is built up until we all attain to the unity of the faith.

Right? So one final point before we close. I want to look at verses 5 through 7, and I've titled this, the word of God increased. So look with me at Acts 6, verse 5.

[45 : 27] 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, Nicanor and Timon, and Parmenas and Nicholas, a proselyte of Andeoc.

These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. So just as the apostles instructed, seven were chosen, and these seven were appointed into this role.

The first was Stephen. Right? We get to know a lot more about Stephen in the preceding chapters about his faithful service, and also his proclamation of the word, and then of course him being stoned.

We learn about Philip, who also proclaimed the word to the Sumerians, and performed miracles. And then we don't really learn much about Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, or Nicholas, except that Nicholas was a proselyte, which means interestingly, he lived in the Greek communities, he converted to Judaism, and then he converted to Christianity.

So it's an interesting role there. But we do know from their names that they were Greek names, and so they were Hellenist likely. So it confirms that they were chosen from among literally the Hellenists.

[46 : 43] And so the apostles, they laid hands on them, they prayed for them, and they installed them. They had an installation service for them, perhaps the first recorded for the church. in this verse here.

But then finally, in verse 7, we see that 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.

And so we see the effect of their faithful service. By installing these seven, they were able to address the concerns, and they were able to continue growing.

And not only that, the word of God increased. Their faithful service ministering to the body allowed the apostles to fulfill their ministry of the word. And so working together, they were able to accomplish their calling.

The body was also unified in this service, which led to the word being proclaimed to the disciples in Jerusalem, and then Samaria, and then the world, as Christ had commanded them.

[47 : 47] wisdom and guidance empowered by the Holy Spirit made it possible for the church to flourish and the word to go forth. The Holy Spirit works through apostles, prophets, evangelists, helpers, and administrators to multiply his church.

And I think this is in great fulfillment of Isaiah 55.10. I won't read it, but the word of God does not return void, as many of you probably know the verse.

the word of God accomplished all that God purposed it to and succeeded in the things for which he sent it. And one final point before we close, many of the priests became obedient to the faith, and I really like this one because the Sadducees and high priests had been trying to crush the apostles and the early church, and instead their own priesthood are converting and believing the gospel.

And I think it's intentional that this is mentioned here. Because the priest had been partly responsible for caring for the widows and the fatherless and the sojourners in the temple.

And upon seeing the church do what Israel continuously failed to do, their faith was inspired and they believed the word.

[49 : 10] right? It's not just preaching that helps people see the reality of the gospel. It's also serving that helps people see that reality lived out.

The ministry of the word and the ministry of the church are inseparable realities that can only be accomplished by a spirit-unified, faithful body. And so I want to encourage you with just a couple things in closing.

I want to remind you that we were given a commission to go into all the world and make disciples, to baptize them in the name of the father, the son, and the spirit, and to teach them to obey all that God commanded us to do.

And that command requires both the ministry of the word and the ministry of the church, these two facets. The ministry of the word is to be proclaimed, right?

It's the power of God for salvation. We must proclaim, not only from the pulpit, not only evangelizing, but in all that we do, that Christ is the son of God, that he suffered on the third day he rose from the dead, and that the forgiveness of sins is granted to all who believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God.

[50 : 28] And we must also proclaim the word in order to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ until we attain the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the son of God, as Paul puts it in Ephesians 4.12.

As such, the elders and overseers continue preaching and teaching, shepherding and overseeing, reproving, rebuking, and exhorting, refuting unsound doctrine, and praying for the sick.

This is their primary calling. And second, the ministry of the church is to further the proclamation of the gospel, which can range from the most mundane tasks of serving to proclaiming the word of God to all the nations.

It can't be accomplished by just a few. The apostles couldn't do it alone, and neither can we. The body must serve together, tend to the complaints, provide solutions, bring unity, steward the resources of the church, and support the ministry of the word.

And the deacons are the ones who foremost do and exemplify this. Remember, as Peter said, each has received a gift. Use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's very grace.

[51 : 44] Whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God, whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies in order that in everything, God may be glorified in Jesus Christ.

And finally, I don't want to leave out everyone who's not an elder or a deacon, right? Most of us are church members, but we're still called to this ministry of the word, and we're still called to this ministry of the church.

We're called to proclaim the gospel, and we're called to support the ministry of the church. Everyone is empowered by the Spirit to conduct their ministry to the glory of God.

A summary statement of Paul in Ephesians 4, speaking the truth in love, we're to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

All of us together fulfill this mission. Let's pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.