

MAIN POINT

In Acts 6:1-7, servant leaders were called to meet the needs of others, not just through their giving but also through serving. The apostles were unable to meet all of the needs of the growing church but they ensured that those needs were met as the gospel was declared. In their example, we see how speaking and serving go together for the sake of the gospel. Living a missional life influences both what you say and what you do.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Describe a time when someone served you by meeting a need in your life. Did you ask for help or did the person anticipate your need? How was your relationship with that person impacted by his/her act of service?

If someone was watching your day-to-day life, what would they say you consider a more important aspect of living sent—declaring the gospel or demonstrating it? Why are both important?

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ACTS 6:1-7.

What was the issue in this passage? Why were servant leaders needed?

Why did the apostles need other people in the church to step up and serve? How does this example impact our church's ministry efforts?

What activities may have kept the church leaders from being aware of the problem with the widows? Are there any groups in danger of going unnoticed in our church? Why? What would be some effective ways to serve these people?

As the church grew, so did its problems. These verses record a cultural clash the early church encountered. The Greek widows in the church felt like they were being left out and not provided for. In order for the apostles to remain focused on their ministry—preaching and prayer—they called servant leaders to make sure the physical needs of people in the church were being met. Rather than helplessly watching the church divide over this issue, seven men stepped up to serve. God calls people from within the church to meet the needs of the church.

What qualifications were required to be a servant leader? Why is each characteristic important?

How has God called you to serve, either in the past or recently? How did you respond to that call? What trait had God been developing in you to prepare you for that specific area of service?

Verse 3 notes that the qualifications to be a servant leader were three-fold: ethically, they must have a good reputation based on their character and conduct. Spiritually, they must be fully dependent on the Holy Spirit. Practically, they must have the wisdom to plan and carry out the necessary tasks. These characteristics are essential for serving the Lord by serving His people.

What is the result of preaching the gospel without meeting physical or emotional needs? On the other hand, what is the result of meeting needs without the clear preaching of the gospel?

According to Acts 6:7, what was the result of this focus on service, and what change did it bring to the church's ministry?

In James 1:27, we read instruction to the people of God that links the Acts 6 example of service with authentic faith. James knew that our words and actions must agree with our beliefs if we're to exhibit genuine Christianity that makes a positive difference. Read James 1:27.

What examples of genuine discipleship did James give in this verse?

Why were widows and orphans especially in need of care? What additional insight does this bring to the Acts passage?

James's words would have resonated with his audience. They knew that in the Old Testament, widows and orphans were representative of the poor, helpless, and defenseless people among the Israelites. James's definition of pure and undefiled religion is based on action.

NEXT STEPS

Leave your group with these parting thoughts, designed to put action to the truths learned and re-emphasize the principles from your meeting time.

God designed us to be both demonstrators and declarers of the gospel, and He gave us the church as a means to not only change the world in His name, but also connect with people who share our love and our mission.

Why is every member of our church important?

In what ways are you dependent on other members of your church? In what ways are others dependent on you?

How has our small group taken up the charge to serve our church and our community? What can we do now to meet a need in our church? Encourage your group members to check out chetscreek.com/serve or connect with one of our pastors to get plugged in.

What are some specific things we can ask God to accomplish through us as we serve in the areas we have discussed? Include these specifics in your closing prayer.

PRAY

Spend some time thanking God for the people in your small group, the relationships you've built, and the opportunities you have to serve each other, your church, and your community. Pray that as you learn to live sent, God would combine the confidence we talked about last week with a heart for service and an awareness of present needs in our church.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up e-mail to your group with some or all of the following information:

- ☐ Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - **What do you see as your role or responsibility in our church?**
 - **What can you do to more consistently serve at Chets Creek and join in serving our community? How can we as a group intentionally help you with this effort?**
 - **Which comes more naturally to you—declaring or demonstrating the gospel? What are some practical ways you can focus on strengthening the one that doesn't come as naturally?**
- ☐ The challenge to memorize Romans 12:11-13.
- ☐ A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

CHETS CREEK CHURCH

LIVING SENT

COMPASSIONATE (ACTS 6:1-7)

SEVEN CHOSEN TO SERVE (ACTS 6:1-7)

6:1 In those days transitions to a new section, introducing an episode occurring probably five or more years after Pentecost. The Jerusalem church experienced great growth. They not only added people; the disciples were multiplying. The term **disciple** identified a Jesus follower in the sense of an adherent to a teacher.

As the church grew so did its problems. One cultural group within the church felt slighted: the Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) Jews, Dispersion descendants who had lived in the Greek-speaking world and culture. They had migrated back to Jerusalem. The Hebraic Jews resided in Palestine, probably speaking both Aramaic and Greek. The difference between these two groups was more than language; they had different customs and cultures in many facets of life and expression. A complaint or murmuring arose. The issue at hand was that the Hellenistic widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution, or the daily ministry, of food, an organized relief system. Widows with no immediate family to support and to care for their daily needs were, in that culture without today's social services, totally dependent on others for survival. Was this discrimination the result of prejudice or resentment or negligence or doctrinal? In all likelihood, the issue was not a theological difference between the two groups but likely an oversight or mistake in administration of the system.

6:2 A solution was needed. The Twelve or the apostles, summoned the whole company of the disciples or the church members to solve the problem. The apostles wanted the whole church involved in finding the solution, which provides a good model for the church today when money is involved. The apostles tendered some of the blame. "It would not be right for us," or pleasing in God's eyes, "to give up preaching about God to handle financial matters." These men were eyewitnesses to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Their place in history was unequivocal. Their message was foundational to Christianity's expansion. For these men to neglect that task would have been detrimental to the church's mission. **Financial matters** referred to administering the social service funds to the widows. The apostles were not too busy for ministry, but preoccupied with the wrong ministry. Their main ministry was prayer and preaching.

6:3 The proposal was to **select ... seven** men. Picking seven men followed Jewish precedent. These men's qualifications were four-fold: **from among you** (men of the church), **of good** (or honorable or above reproach) **reputation, full of** (or controlled by) **the Spirit**, and **wisdom** (or capable of handling the delicate situation with competence and sensitivity).

6:4 The apostles' strategy enabled them to devote themselves to prayer and to the preaching ministry. Prayer would include both private and corporate petitions. The preaching ministry would include both proclaiming the good news of salvation to the lost and instructing in discipleship those who came to faith in Jesus. Both elements—prayer and preaching—form a natural pair. One without the other would prove ineffective, handicapping the church's growth. These two fundamentals provide an excellent job description for modern pastors.

6:5-6 The plan was good. The proposal presented by the apostles was approved and accepted by the church. The apostles prayed and laid their hands on them, symbolizing the church's authorizing and blessing the leaders to carry out their task. These men, having met the qualifications outlined by the apostles, were thus commissioned to fulfill a special responsibility to the church. They were gifted in this area, now they were to serve in order to meet the growing church's needs. The seven assumed this responsibility.

6:7 The result of their action was that **the preaching ... flourished**, extending wider and wider, reaching more people for Christ. The apostles, distracted no longer, could apply themselves to their main responsibility—preaching and praying. In addition, **the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly**, meaning the church increased in people. The church spread even in an unexpected area—among Jewish priests. As we would expect, many priests lived in and around Jerusalem, some sources indicate as many as 8,000. Many of these struggled with daily survival. They were attracted to the Christian community who taught the truth, practiced community, and served one another.