



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V22 N4 January 26, 2020

REMEMBERSHIP

“reMEMBER Ministry”

Acts 6:1-7

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Spiritual Gifts

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

“For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith.”

Romans 12:4-6



What does
ministry look
like?

Spiritual formation, discipleship, and sanctification are all terms we use to refer to the process we go through to become like Jesus (Ro 8:29). The process is both *intentional* and *incidental*. The intentional aspect entails the Spirit's use of deliberate spiritual practices like worship, Bible study and meditation, prayer, solitude and silence to transform us. The incidental aspect entails his use of the unforeseen circumstances and unscripted encounters in life like financial reversals, casual conversations, unexpected conflict – the “I-didn't-see-that-coming” events in life – to transform us. The first amounts to what we learn about life, while the second amounts to what we learn in life, often from one another.

Paul tells the Ephesians that Christ has commissioned pastors and teachers to “equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (4:11-13). Put differently, the body of Christ is built up by his people equipped for works of service by pastors and teachers. Paul doubles down on this idea in verse 16: “From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, *as each part does its work*.” The last phrase “as each part does its work” is an allusion to gifted members of the body using their gifts for the benefit of others. Paul tells the Romans much the same thing. “For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts account to the grace given to each of us” (12:4-6a). That being the case,

he goes on to encourage members of the body to use their individual gifts whatever they might be (vv. 6b-8). We are all partners in one another's transformation and partners with the Holy Spirit in the transformation of the whole body of Christ.

While we can't deny our giftedness – everyone has at least one spiritual gift (1Co 12:7, 11) – we can neglect using our gifts. One former pastor writes: “We are created to join God on a mission. Some people think of God as hanging around beyond the edges of the universe somewhere, listening to really good worship music. The Bible sees it much differently. It teaches that God is at work 24/7, all over our world, filling his followers with grace and mercy and power to reclaim and redeem and fix this broken planet.” The grace, mercy, and power that he speaks of are an allusion to the spiritual giftedness of every Christ follower. He continues, “It's as if God has work gloves on. And he calls us to roll up our sleeves and join him with our talents, our money, our time, and our passion. He wants his mission to become ours. ‘If you're into chasing the wind,’ he tells us, ‘you can keep right on doing that. Or you can hook up with me, and together we'll transform this hurting planet. What would it feel like to lay your head on your pillow at night and say, ‘You know what I did today? I teamed up with God to change the world’? Whenever we wonder if the daily eight-to-five grind or our round-the-clock parenting tasks are all there is to life, that divine desire nudges us. Whenever we feel restless and unsatisfied, the desire whispers in our soul. Whenever we wonder what a life of real purpose would feel like, the desire calls us to something more” (Bill Hybels, *The Volunteer Revolution*, 13-14). Don't you agree?



EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle "Hellenistic" and "Hebraic" in v. 1.
- Box "because" indicating *reason* in v. 1.
- Bracket "daily distribution of food" in v. 1.
- Box "so" indicating *result* in vv. 2, 7.
- Bracket "wait on tables" in v. 2
- Underline "who are known" in v. 3.
- Highlight "full of the Spirit and wisdom" in v. 3.
- Highlight "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" in v. 5.
- Underline "a convert of Judaism" in v. 5.
- Bracket "laid their hands on them" in v. 6.
- In the margin next to v. 7 write "See 1:8; cf., other progress reports 2:47; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:29; 28:30, 31."

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What is one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Before the responsibility was turned over to seven chosen men, who was *apparently* responsible for the daily distribution of food to widows?
2. The widows of *Hellenist* Jews were being neglected. Explain the seriousness of the problem.
3. How come the Twelve turned the problem over to *the disciples* to solve?
4. Explain how the disciples would have known who was “full of the Spirit and wisdom.”
5. Do you think the men whom the disciples chose had a choice in the matter? Explain.
6. All of the men chosen had *Greek* names. What does that suggest to you and why does it matter?
7. Stephen was “*full of faith and of the Holy Spirit*.” Put what that means in your own words.
8. What *purpose* did the laying on of the apostles’ hands serve in this situation?
9. Relate verse 7 to verses 1-6.
10. **Discussion:** The “moral” of this story isn’t obvious — could it be that it doesn’t have just one? Talk about its

Commentary On The Text

Acts 6:1-7 describes a problem that developed in the Jerusalem church—maybe within five years or so after Pentecost (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 178)—and how the Twelve solved it. It was a problem most churches would welcome because it resulted from the congregation's rapid growth. People were responding to the gospel, which was being proclaimed every day in the temple courts and from house to house (5:42). "When the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food" (v. 1). Such flagrant discrimination had to be addressed quickly because it undermined the unity of "heart and mind" (4:32) enjoyed by the congregation. One commentator explains: "The values emphasized in previous descriptions of the Jerusalem church show that it is an important problem. In 4:32, 34 we were told that the church's 'heart and soul were one,' and 'there was no needy person among them' because property owners were willing to sell their goods and share. Now we hear of a 'complaint' or 'grumbling' (6:1) that disturbs the church's unity. The threat to unity appears precisely in the area of the church's life where unity had been most clearly demonstrated; the sharing of wealth with the needy" (Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, 2:80).

But rather than neglect the ministry of the word to remain in charge of benevolence, the Twelve gather all the disciples together and tell *them* to select seven spiritual men who are competent to take over the responsibility. And the disciples do just that. As directed by the apostles, the congregation selects seven men who are "full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (v. 3)—most if not all of whom are Hellenists—who are able to address the concerns of the overlooked widows. Hellenists are chosen to address a Hellenist complaint—a good plan. The fact that the men are "full of the Spirit and of wisdom" suggests that their lives are marked by the influence of the Spirit and the exercise of wisdom, which means they would have the discernment and practical know-how to manage charitable funds. In light of the congregants' different languages, Greek versus Hebrew (or its contemporary vernacular equivalent, Aramaic), one commentator speculates the seven may have been leaders of seven Hellenist house churches in Jerusalem (see James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 84). Perhaps the seven followed a Jewish practice familiar to them. Every Friday the Jews distributed enough money for fourteen meals to their resident needy. There was also a daily distribution to nonresidents and transients that consisted of food and drink, which was delivered house to house wherever the needy were resid-

ing. The Christian practice apparently reflected *both* elements. Like the second it was daily; like the first it was for resident members (see Polhill, 180).

Two of the men, Stephen, who is "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit," and Philip play continuing roles in Acts. Understandably, this incident prepares us for Stephen's speech and martyrdom in Acts 7 and for Philip's mission in Acts 8. Once the men are selected, the apostles "laid their hands on them" in recognition of their selection for the task. This is neither an example of our current practice of ordination nor an explanation of the origin of the diaconate. "The word 'deacon' (*diakonos*) never occurs in the passage. The word 'ministry' (*diakonia*) does occur several times, but it is applied to both the ministry of the daily distribution (v. 2) and the ministry of the word, the apostolic witness (v. 4). In fact, the word 'deacon' never occurs in Acts" (Polhill, 182). To "wait on tables" (v. 2) is most likely a figurative expression referring to the overall responsibility for the food distribution program, which probably involved something more than and other than actually serving as "waiters."

And what was the result? According to verse 7, "the word of God spread. The number of disciples increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith." Somewhat ironically, growth had threatened the unity of the body, but when the threat is addressed and unity is maintained, the body continues to grow. The Twelve show a willingness to share community leadership with others and sensitivity to the feelings of all parties, arriving at a solution satisfactory to all. They don't try to do it all; they involve gifted volunteers in a critical ministry.

So what's the point of the narrative? It *describes* a practical problem that threatened the unity of the community and how the apostles directed the disciples to solve it. It *introduces* two characters, Stephen and Philip, who play important roles in subsequent chapters of the narrative. It *illustrates* how the body is to function as various gifted members share in ministry to one another and later to the outside world: "In sum, this unit *shows* the community using its own people to solve its own problems. The community hears the complaint, owns up to the problem, allows those closest to it to solve it, delegates the authority to get it done, and then goes to work. This issue is not denied or papered over but confronted directly as a community concern" (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 262, *italics added*). Luke shows, perhaps implicitly commends, the actions of the disciples, suggesting that disciples today would do well to behave likewise, but it does not *prescribe*. It does not prescribe one solution for every possible church problem, neither does it prescribe the selection of a standing board of deacons in every church.

Word Studies/Notes

v. 1 *Hellenistic Hebraic* Hebraic Jews were for the most part natives of Palestine who spoke Aramaic in addition to Greek and used the Hebrew Scriptures. Hellenistic Jews were for the most part from outside of Palestine; they spoke Greek and used the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. On “Hellenistic Jews” one author writes, “We should very likely think of this element within the early church along the lines of ‘Hellenized Jewish Christians’ or ‘Grecian Jewish believers’ – that is, as Jews living in Jerusalem who had come from the Diaspora and were under some suspicion by reason of their place of birth, their speech, or both, of being more Grecian than Hebraic in their attitudes and outlook but who, since coming to Jerusalem, had become Christians. Many of them, no doubt, had originally returned to the homeland out of religious ardor and today would be called Zionists” (Richard N. Longenecker, “Acts” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 329). “‘Hellenists’ would seem to indicate Greek-speaking Jews of the Diaspora who were living in Jerusalem . . . That there would have been many such Diaspora converts in the Jerusalem Christian community is altogether likely, given the large number of them who were present at Pentecost (2:5-11) . . . Diaspora Jews often moved to Jerusalem in their twilight years to die in the holy city. When the men died, their widows were left far from their former home and family to care for them and were thus particularly in need of charity. Many of them may have been attracted to the Christian community precisely because of its concern for the material needs of its members” (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 177, 79).

v. 1 *complained* Their complaint may have been but the tip of a grievance’s iceberg. Cultural prejudices and resentments of other kinds may have heightened tensions between the two groups. “The linguistic and social differences produced cultural differences that created a division in the church . . . that the community now recognizes and works swiftly to quell” (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 258).

v. 1 *distribution of food* “The daily distribution (*kathēmerinē*) or ministry (*diakonia*) involves necessary food and probably some clothing and possibly necessary money (Le Cornu and Shulam 2003; 309; see also p. 303 on how widows were cared for)” (Bock, 257). “Judaism had a system for the distribution of food and supplies to the poor, both to the wandering pauper and to those living in Jerusalem itself (cf. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, pp. 126-34) . . . The early Christian community at

Jerusalem also expressed its spiritual unity in communal sharing of possessions and in charitable acts (cf. 2:44-45; 4:32-5:11). Apparently with the ‘increasing’ number of believers and with the passing of time, the number of Hellenistic widows dependent on relief from the church became disproportionately large. Many pious Jews of the Diaspora had moved to Jerusalem in their later years in order to be buried near it, and their widows would have had no relatives near at hand to care for them as would the widows of the longtime residents. Nor as they became Christians would the ‘poor baskets’ of the national system of relief be readily available to them. So the problem facing the church became acute” (Longenecker, 330).

v. 2 *the disciples* Cf., v. 1. The term “disciples” is used with reference to Christians here first in Acts. It occurs frequently in the Gospels but never in the letters.

v. 3 *who are known* Cf., “of good repute” (ESV); “who are well attested” (NET); “who are well respected” (NLT).

v. 3 *full of* To be “full of” something is to be characterized by it. To be “full of the Spirit” means to live in accord with the Spirit, or be spiritual. To be “full of wisdom” means to live skillfully, or be competent. The men chosen were known for their spirituality and competence.”

v. 6 *men* Often called the first “deacons” although the Greek word *diakonos* (“deacon”) does not appear in the passage. However, the related words *diakonia* (“distribution,” v. 1) and *diakoneo* (“ministry,” v. 4) do appear. It seems the ministry functioned long before deacon became viewed as an office (Longenecker, 331).

v. 6 *laid hands* The laying on of hands was used in the OT in connection with “the bestowal of a blessing (cf. Gen 48:13ff.), to express identification, as when the sacrificer laid his hands on the head of the sacrificial victim (cf. Lev. 1:4; 3:2; 4:4; 16:21 etc.), for commissioning a successor (cf. Num 27:23) and the like” (F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, NICNT, 130).

Other Texts to Consider

Romans 12:4-6

“For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.”



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Partner in the ministry of your church using your spiritual gifts, because when believers do, issues in the church will be resolved and the number of disciples added to the church will increase.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

The uniqueness of your child can simultaneously swell your heart and make you want to throttle them. What makes them different from you and sometimes challenging may also be their best quality and potentially their spiritual gift. Do you have a child that never stops asking, "Why?" They may have the spiritual gift of knowledge. Do you have a child that always wants to do things their own way? Maybe their spiritual gift is leadership. I had one child that was clearly a leader without even noticing and I remember thinking, "one day this will glorify God." Sure enough, this child's spiritual gift is definitely leadership and he uses it for kingdom purposes. Spiritual gifts are not natural abilities; they are a special blend of talents and gifts that make believers uniquely able to carry out the plans God has for their life. Part of a parent's job is to help identify and foster these gifts. I talked to a mom recently who shared her personal commitment to further her daughter's love for serving by providing opportunities to demonstrate that gift. Bravo, Mom! So, how do you encourage your child's gift? First and foremost, pray for their salvation. Secondly, pray God reveals the special and unique gift they have been given. Look for open doors that give them space to explore opportunities and develop their spiritual gift. Seek to encourage and affirm your child when they are using their gifts. Parents, we are praying for wisdom and discernment as you help your child grow to glorify God!

What Does The Bible Say?

What does the Bible say? *Read Acts 6:1-7*

1. What was the problem and how did they solve it?
2. What character traits did the seven men need to have?
3. What spread after this decision?

What Do You Think?

The apostles "prayed and laid hands on" the men assigned to care for the widows. What do you think that's all about?

What Do You Do?

There are many people who serve the church. Take a moment to write a letter to your small group leader or another volunteer and bring it Sunday for one extra token.

CORE COMPETENCY: Spiritual Gifts

I use the special abilities God has given me to help with His work.

MEMORY VERSE: 1 Peter 4:10

Each one should use whatever gifts he has received to serve others.

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- _____ I completed my Bible Study
- _____ I memorized this week's verse
- _____ I brought my Bible to church
- _____ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME _____

GRADE _____

PARENT SIGNATURE _____

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

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