

Maintaining the Ministry: Acts 6:1-7

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 January 2022

Preacher: Scott Liddell

[0 : 00] I pray this year would be a wonderful year where we would abide with Christ and bear the fruits thereof. And we would pursue wholeheartedly to know Him and make Him known.

I'm grateful that you have come to worship this morning, the Lord. I'm not a deep sports fan, however. Anthony Davis is a young man who plays currently for the LA Lakers.

But when he was in high school, he was 6'2 as a sophomore. And as a 6'2 sophomore, that's a position and that's a height at which you are a point guard, which the point guard is in positions. It's the number one player. He's the guy who calls the plays for the offense. He's the one who is usually one of the smarter players on the team. He's directing. He knows where everybody should be.

And he was a point guard at 6'2. By the time he was a senior, he grew to 6'10. He currently is 6'11. He's almost a 7'2.

[1 : 08] But in high school, in 18 months, he grew 8 inches. And so there were some growing pains that he had, not only physically, but also in terms of athletically.

He knew what it was to be a point guard, but now he was shifted from the number two player, then to the number three player. Now he was on the wing and now he was learning how to drive into the key and how to set up the post player.

And then, as he kept growing, he was the power forward position, the number five position, the post player. And so then he had to learn what it is to post up.

And then he had to learn what it is to box out and rebound and shot block and all of these things.

And so he had to learn all of these different positions. In a matter of 18 months, he was kept getting shifted around to when he graduated as a high school.

And as a 6'2 player, he only had one scholarship to play at a university as a sophomore. But by the time he graduated, he was the number one recruit out of high school.

[2 : 10] He only played one year for Kentucky, led them to an NCAA championship that year, and then went into the NBA draft as the number one overall pick. He's quite the amazing player.

So there was a lot of opportunities, but there was also a lot of growing pains in growing 8 inches in 18 months. And I look at that growing pain, and what we're going to read in our text today is what I would say is just the growing pains of a local church.

And the church at Jerusalem, if you've been with us, we have been looking at the book of Acts. And there's been attacks from the outside and there's been attacks from the inside.

And Luke, the author of Acts, has been showing how this church has been growing and there's been these attacks. And so I want to review these attacks before we get into our text.

But there's a attack from the outside. Peter and John, they're preaching the gospel through the power of God. They heal this person who was born lame. They begin proclaiming the gospel.

[3 : 20] A large crowd begins to assemble. And in the middle of that time, an attack from the outside comes. The members of the Sanhedrin come and they warn him, do not continue to preach the gospel or else.

Then there's attacks from the inside that then we have the story of Ananias and Sapphira. That in the church there are people who, Ananias and Sapphira, who wanted to deceive people into thinking they were more generous than they were.

They were more spiritual than they were. So they said, they gave the impression they gave and they told, they gave the whole amount when in reality, they had only given a portion of the proceeds of the land that they had given.

And that deception God was so upset with that he took their life prematurely. Then there's again attacks from the outside. Peter is beginning to proclaim the gospel again back on the temple mount.

And then they're arrested. They're put in prison. An angel of the Lord delivers them out of the prison. And then they go right back to proclaiming the gospel.

[4 : 26] Members of the Sanhedrin come again. They have them beaten and they're warned. Don't continue preaching the gospel. And today we're going to see another attack from the inside.

But I would call this a growing pain. There's growing pains in this young church. And so if you have your Bible, please open it to Acts chapter 6.

The book of Acts in the New Testament, chapter 6, we're going to read verses 1 through 7. And let me set the context.

And in a matter of four to six months, a little church of 120 people who were gathered in a room that were said, were told, don't go anywhere until the Holy Spirit comes upon you.

Those numbered 120. Then the Holy Spirit comes upon and Peter begins preaching. And by this time, many theologians believe that the church is likely soaring to over 20,000 people.

[5 : 32] So in a matter of four to six months, a church goes from 120, shepherded by 12 apostles, to 20,000, four to six months later, shepherded by 12 apostles.

And then we find this text. Here we are. Acts chapter 6 verses 1 through 7. 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.

And the 12 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.

Therefore, brothers, pick out among yourselves seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, who we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to the prayer and to the ministry of the word.

And what they said, please the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith in the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Procurus, and Niconor, and Timon, Parmenus, and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch.

[6 : 52] These they set before the apostles and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.

And a great many priests came obedient to the faith. Here is an attack from the inside.

Here is this growing pain that surfaced. And I want to say a few things about growing pains that we see in this text, firstly, that we should celebrate gospel-centered growth.

Notice this whole passage is book-ended by two verses that emphasize the growing of the church. In these days, verse one, when the disciples were increasing in number, that's how the passage opens.

And then the last verse that we read, verse seven, and the word of God continued to increase and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem and a great many priests came obedient to the faith.

[8 : 00] So we should celebrate in growing pains, we should celebrate gospel-centered growth.

And I know what you may say and what I may agree with you is that this, that not all growth is good.

And I would agree. We can do things to build a crowd, we can do things to build one's own kingdom. All of that is to handily be put down. We, we, we must reject church growth idolatry when everyone is about numbers.

In addition, we can become obsessed with church growth, sacrificing core principles, and we can even sacrifice the gospel in order to achieve this. All of this is to be handily put down.

But this passage helps us understand that church growth, what it looks like sensibly, the passage informs us of the kind of church growth, that is, and the word of God continued to increase.

It is a gospel-centered growth. It is, it came as a result of passionate gospel preaching and compassionate ministry. Look with me at the preceding verse in the, in the last verse in chapter five.

[9 : 09] This is says, and every day in the temple from house to house, they who are the apostles did not cease from teaching that Christ is Jesus. This is gospel-centered preaching.

This is gospel-centered growth. So when the gospel is front and center, and that is our aim at fourth, we must rejoice when the church grows.

I love how Paul, who I'm sorry, I love how Luke, the author of Acts, does not have an aversion to celebrating new individuals joining the church.

Luke has this multiplication mindset. And you say, okay, Scott, is Luke all about numbers?

No. Luke counts people because people count. People matter to God as they should matter to us. Imagine with me, imagine with me, I'm going to pick on Chris and Ginny.

[10:10] This is why you don't want to sit in the, in the front. So this is why Chris and Ginny, if Chris and Ginny, they have four children, their eldest daughter is not here with us. No, I'm not going to ask.

So Chris and Ginny have four children. And it would, and would it be wrong of them if they set out on a family vacation to say, and to make a head check to make sure everyone is in the car before they head out on vacation?

And they think, one, two, three, four. Okay, we got it. So, and would it be wrong of them to make a head check and count, head count of all of their children every stop along the way, every restroom stop?

You wouldn't think that. Are they all about numbers? No. They're responsible for those children. And so they want to make sure everyone is accounted for. And that's the idea.

So we should celebrate gospel-centered church growth. Number two, we should expect problems when the church grows. Look with me in verse six. Is everything good because the church is growing?

[11:10] No. Uncomplaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because the widows were being neglected the daily distribution. Now notice in the daily distribution, it doesn't tell us what form of the distribution that it takes.

It could be, and it may include all of this, food, and maybe clothing. Most likely it is food and clothing and maybe a number of other things.

Housing, lodging, whatever it may be. But these widows, some of the widows were being neglected in their daily distribution. That's why a lot of people just think it's mainly talking about food and bread.

There's a neglect of these widows. Is the early church perfect? Absolutely not. Did the early church have a lot of qualities that were very good?

Absolutely yes. And yet this one problem did arise. And the matter was serious. It involves widows. Attending to the need of the widows was a very serious situation.

[12:15] For we read in James this, 1.27. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this. To visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from this world.

That the care of widows is very important to the church. Widows and orphans are of special concern. Why?

What is absent to them is the opportunity to make money and any kind of social welfare. So in the first century widows and orphans were helpless to provide for themselves.

So the law of God for Israel was to have special concern for helpless people. So too should the church. In Israel there were to care for the widows, the orphans, the foreigner, the poor.

All of these were to be cared for and were done so through the law. And now in the New Testament church it is still a high concern for the people of God. If you think this isn't a big deal, perhaps it is a big deal to the heart of God because it is the very heart of God.

[13:26] For we read in Psalms this that God is a father to the fatherless and a defender of the widows. Church how are we doing in the caring for the vulnerable populations?

Our texts suggest that the church's compassion and could and should be measured by how it cares for the poor and orphans and the widows, those who are vulnerable.

But the problem goes deeper. It's not just a matter of a lack of concern for the widows. It's a matter of bias that is in the church.

It demonstrates a cultural and linguistic bias that is in the church. And I would also include race but the text is illustrating, it's more of a linguistic thing because of the solution.

But I'll get to that matter later. It's regarding the Hellenists and the Greeks versus the Hebrews. And let me try to explain the difference between those two.

[14:33] It says a complaint in verse 1, by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. So who are these two groups of individuals? First the Hellenists or the Greeks, some of your translations may say.

That is, they are of Jewish descent but they lived outside of Jerusalem, outside of Judea, outside of maybe even Galilee.

And so as a result, now they have come and they've returned to Jerusalem but now they are Greek speaking. So they are Jews but they are Greek speaking Jews.

They would be people who you would be, obviously you would say, you're not from around here and your language would give you away. And also the problem may go deeper than that because they lived so far away from Jerusalem.

Perhaps this is not stated explicitly but perhaps they had a lesser view of God's law. Perhaps they had a lesser view of the role of the temple.

[15 : 35] Perhaps they had been influenced a little bit more by the Roman culture and they were, because they were speaking that language. And those are the widows that were being discriminated against from the Hebrew widows.

So who are the Hebrews? They are Jews but who did not depart in and around from Jerusalem. So they spoke Aramaic, they also probably also spoke Greek.

But they were the majority culture, they were the faithful Israel, they were from Jerusalem, they were from Judea. They were not those who were from foreign parts of the country or the land.

They were the ones who had not left the land of Israel and there were widows were being cared for properly. So this wasn't necessarily a sin of commission, that is a sinful act that is being taken against someone.

I'm sorry, a sinful action that we take action to commit. It could be in a thought, a motive, a word or deed, things like stealing, lying, murder, adultery, gossip.

[16 : 49] With the motive of meaning someone's harm, this could be either intentional or unintentional. What this is though, it is maybe a matter of sin of omission. That is, I think this way, in this way, or I think this way because of these reasons.

You have the church exploding and you have a minority group of Jewish people who speak a different language and their widows are being discriminated against from the majority culture individuals.

It's not that the apostles thought that they should not care for widows. It's not a matter of a lack of concern for widows.

The apostles knew better. But what it is, is this capacity issue. So I say it's a sin of omission. The sin of omission is a result of not doing something that God's word teaches us that we ought to do.

For in James 4.17 says this, anyone who knows to do good but does not do it, to him it is sin. So the sin of omission is why the story of the good Samaritan is in God's word.

[18 : 00] It's a man who is beaten and left in need of help. The priest walked by, don't help. The Levite walks by, doesn't help. Along comes a Samaritan and he stops and he shows compassion to the man who is in need.

It is sinful to avoid doing good, just as it is to pursue that which is evil. And so the sin of omission is sometimes easier to commit and it's easier to excuse.

And you may not even be fully aware that you're doing it. And I think this text is important and it's really good for this reason.

Sometimes the sin of omission is birthed out of a willful desire. I'm not going to do, I know what to do good but I'm just not going to do it. Sometimes it's a willful choice but here I believe it is more a rather, and so I see one part of the sin is a bias that exists.

But I also see one part of it is just limitations. There is this expectation of these apostles to minister to 20,000 people and they can't do it.

[19 : 13] And because the text illustrates the solution, so it's not just a matter of this wanting to willfully ignore the widows, while there is some form of bias likely there, it is also a form of limitation.

Again, 20,000 believers, 120 who had seen the risen Christ, 12 apostles. There was just a limited number of individuals. And think of this, every believer who are not of the 120 and who are not of the apostles, outside of that group of individuals, every believer is at most six months old mature believer in Christ.

That would have some dynamics on that young early church. So what were the apostles doing?

You say, Scott, you're giving the apostles a lot of leeway here.

You're giving them some credibility. What are they doing? So let's look at what were the apostles doing? Number one, they are protecting and promoting the unity of the church.

You say, Scott, how are they doing this? They were dealing with a mixture of injustices and they were dealing with a mixture of sinful responses.

[20 : 34] The injustice is that there's this neglect of widows going on and then there's a list of perhaps sinful responses. One of them is perhaps cited. It says that a complaint arose against the Hebrews because of the widows being neglected.

So there's this division within the church of the minority group against the majority group. But is that the way complaints should be levied? Paul tells us that we should avoid complaining.

We must not put Christ to the test as some of them did, as he says in 1 Corinthians, and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble or complain as some of them did and were destroyed by the destroyer.

Complaining is serious. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, we're told, in Philippians. While the Greek-speaking widows had a right to be bothered and there was an injustice going on by being neglected the daily distribution, they did not have the right to complain against the majority culture Hebrews.

They were taking their own complaint to the wrong audience. They should have taken their complaint to the leaders, to the apostles. Just because you are wrong does not excuse your sinful behavior such as complaining.

[21 : 46] That's an application for us today. So what do we do when we have been harmed? I want to walk through a process that I use just in my own mind when I am hurt or offended or have been caused harm.

What is it that I do? I ask questions. First question is this. What is the biblically appropriate response? Because there's all kinds of biblically inappropriate responses that we all may have. Let me list a few.

When we have been harmed, when we have been wrong, the temptation in our flesh is to gossip, to slander, to strike a person, to strike a dog, to strike a wall, to throw objects, yell at the top of our lungs, break things, pout, silent treatment, shame other person, causing or using cutting sarcasm, drowned as sorrow and an addiction, thinking poorly of others or watering the root of bitterness to grow into full contempt for another.

And you say, Scott, those just kind of rattled off your tongue and you must have some experience about this. We're not here to talk about that. So the first question is, what is the biblically appropriate response?

Because those other responses come oh so naturally and they come oh so common. What is the biblically appropriate response?

[23 : 09] Second question I ask is this. Am I offended or am I taking up an offense? Because taking up an offense illustrates that I'm not loving you and here's how that could happen.

Let's imagine Ken. This is again, you don't want to sit in the front. This is why no one sits in the front. So we have Ken here. And let's assume Ken didn't greet me this morning, which he did by the way, but let's assume Ken did not greet me this morning.

And I choose to be offended by that. Did he cause me harm? Did he wrong me or am I just choosing to take up an offense? One of the two you can see is an unloving behavior.

When I take up an offense, and boy, we can, our culture is rife with people taking up offenses. No one meant or did any harm, but you choose to take up an offense. It's also called a victim mentality as well.

When you take up an offense, what you're doing is saying, I don't love you because I don't believe the best about Ken. I don't love, hopes all things.

[24 : 23] It believes all things. It believes the best in others. And so when you take up an offense, it's the most unloving thing we could possibly do. So I ask myself the question, what is the Biblically appropriate response?

And am I offended or am I taking up an offense? Second, you say, well, Scott, what are some biblical responses then?

We have, I can think of three things. Number one, Proverbs 19-11, I memorized this years ago in the New King James. But it says this, a person's wisdom yields patience and is to one's glory to overlook an offense.

Think about this. If we confronted every person over every harm that was ever caused, how many conversations we would have with individuals, and likely we would all think, boy, now there is a difficult friend, because they make everything a big deal.

And worthy of a confrontation and a conversation. So what does God's word say? It is to one's glory to overlook an offense.

[25 : 42] That there, that is a biblical response. And it is to your credit to do so. Second, when someone has harmed you, what can you do?

Matthew 18 prescribes a method for which you can take. Matthew 18, you know this. Someone has harmed you, and you can go through a process of writing that, forgiving that person.

And so Matthew chapter 18, 15 through 20, describes a process of sharing the fault with a brother. If they don't hear you, take two. If they don't hear you, elders, and then take it to the church, that whole process in Matthew 18.

Most of, many of you are familiar with that. But there's another one that also applies here. And this is in a power differential relationship.

And let me explain. Let's assume I am a resident, I'm a college student, and my RA, who is the resident advisor, overseeing this group of college students who I live in this dorm with, that person has caused harm.

[27 : 00] But because they have authority over me, I don't know if I can directly go to that person, and maybe the wrong isn't necessarily to me, but I just know that they're breaking the rules, and they're doing some things that they shouldn't be doing.

But they may take it out on me if I go to them directly. And so that's what I mean by a power over situation. So then I go to the resident director overseeing the RA, who has authority over that RA, over that issue.

So when there's a power over situation, you have another recourse that you can operate in der biblically. And here's why I say that. This is what the whole book of Philemon is about.

Read the Philemon account when you go home tonight. And you will, this afternoon, you'll see this. That Philemon is a slave owner.

And Onesimus is a slave. And Onesimus has wronged Philemon. And Paul is sending Onesimus the slave back to Philemon.

[28 : 04] And he says, a credit to me, Paul, the debt that Onesimus has incurred to you, a credit on my account. And I have authority over you, Philemon, as the apostle.

And so please receive back your slave and let his debt be on my account. But you receive back that slave. And that's what the whole book of Philemon is about.

So when there's a power over situation, what can you do? You can go to that person's authority to make it practical. And in my life, one of the things that I do is, when someone volunteers for me directly, personally, in the church office, and there are many people who have helped me incredibly, one of the things I do is I sit down with them in a meeting before they even begin, and I say, well, here's kind of what I would like for you to do.

Here's the thing. And then I'll take a time out in the conversation, and I'll say this. I want you to know, if I ever caused you harm, or if you think that there is something that is being done in this church office that I have oversight of, that you think I'm willfully turning a blind eye, or that I'm accountable for in some way, you have the elders to talk to.

They are whom I'm accountable to, and you are welcome to talk to any of them. They have the right and the privilege to discipline me, and if I don't hear them, they have the right and the privilege to dismiss me.

[29 : 34] But why do I do that? I recognize that there is a power differential. There's an authority thing that's at play that may make it hard to talk to me personally, especially if they perceive I won't hear them.

So that said, regardless, the apostles were busy protecting and promoting the church unity. They were also keeping up with legitimate needs.

Think with me, 120 prior to Pentecost, four to six months, 20,000 people being added. You mean to tell me that this complaint of the widows was the only stress point that the early church felt.

They were constantly having to devise plans to handle new problems that would have inevitably come. The reason why we don't have a longer list, we have seven verses, the reason why we don't have several chapters is because they were keeping up with legitimate needs.

And they were constantly devising plans to handle new problems. And the fact that we don't read about more is an attribute to the apostles keeping up with legitimate needs.

[30 : 45] And they did all of this without Microsoft Excel. What else were they doing? They were responding and handling criticism.

Responding to and handling criticism. The 12 apostles considered the complaint legitimate. In fact, in rectifying this situation, they refer to this matter as a duty in the bottom of verse three, the last word in verse three.

It's a legitimate duty. It's a legitimate responsibility. Furthermore, the apostles believe the interest of the whole church, not just the widows, is best served by a strategic division of labor.

They took this complaint seriously. And so notice what they did in verse three. Therefore, brothers, I'm sorry, verse two, and the 12, the apostles, summoned the full number of disciples and said, can you imagine this?

This logistical nightmare, the full number of disciples. That's 20,000 people. They summoned the whole church, 20,000 people, and said, it is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God and serve tables.

[32 : 00] Therefore, brothers, pick out among you seven men of good reputation. So 20,000 people who among you and they gave them qualifications that are good reputation full of the spirit and wisdom whom you can appoint to this duty.

So they gave them the qualifications. Now it's up to the congregation to give them a list of seven names. And then they affirmed that decision by laying their hands on them and they enlisted them and prayed for them.

The apostles were faced with a natural fault line that threatened to fracture the very unity Christ died for. The gospel insists that after all, that our unity in Christ supersedes the worldly difference. So make no mistake, the apostles did not delegate this problem to others because it wasn't important. They delegated it for the very opposite. It was so important.

The apostles could have enlisted a swift answer and a superficial solution and moved on. Instead, they laid a groundwork for an ongoing solution and a permanent church office.

[33 : 10] And I say a permanent church office for this reason. There's only four times in the God's word that the word deacon is used as an office and one's in Timothy, one's in Philippians.

Those two are explicit. There is one debatable text in Romans 16 and this is the one implicit text that many people say this is the beginnings of the deacon ministry.

That they enlisted these men to serve the practical needs of the church and they say this because of the word the verb form of deacon in the bottom of verse two.

We should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. That word serve tables is to deacon, if you will. And so they established, if you will, this permanent church office many people believe in this incipient form of the deacon ministry.

So we just went through the process. They were to enlist seven men, good reputation. They gave the qualifications full of the spirit and full of wisdom.

[34 : 21] And you say, well, Scott, how is it that they're responding to and handling criticism? I want to suggest something.

Can you imagine these new people? You're a widow. You know Peter, the apostle Peter. He's been the one so far that's been preaching and then you get this guy whose name is Nickonore.

Who are you? I want Peter to serve me, bread. Why? Because Peter, I'm not only hungry. I would like my bread, but I want his shadow to fall on me because I'm also not feeling well and I may be healed.

And if you were here a few weeks, you know, that's part of the text in the previous text. Nickonore, I want Peter. I am sure the temptation, there was temptation to be critical to change.

This was a new plan because we know change always goes over oh so well. The people need to avoid such complaining.

[35 : 31] The apostles needed to handle people's various reactions to hard decisions made wisely and graciously. The apostles have chosen men and this seemed to be pleasing to the people.

That way of selecting the seven, verse five says, and what they said, please the whole gathering in verse five. And then they chose the seven men.

The apostles were undoubtedly responding and handling criticism. Fourthly, they were prioritizing the whole, the ministry to the entire congregation, to the entire church.

And how do we see that? By doing what please the Lord. Look with me in verse two. A complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because the widow's being neglected.

And the twelve summoned the full number of disciples and said, so here's what the apostles say. The twelve apostles, they are saying it is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.

[36 : 45] What was not right? So how is it that they were prioritizing the ministry of the entire church through this decision by doing what please the Lord. Something about them serving tables and neglecting the word of God would have been not right.

That would have not pleased the Lord. Also, my point number two is this, by remaining faithful to the calling as apostles. They were to proclaim God's word.

That is what the Lord had called them to. So by them leaving that duty, the whole church would have been hindered. The whole church would have been hurt. There's a primacy of God's word that is held up that will benefit the whole church.

Others can serve these widows so carefully, so dearly. By prioritizing the word of God and prayer. This is my third point. Both in verse two, it is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. In verse two, and in verse four, we will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

[38 : 02] I want us to see how they are elevating and there's the primacy, the primary value for the word of God and prayer by these apostles.

When the apostles survey the situation of the widows, they rule out two things immediately. We cannot stop praying. We cannot stop preaching. To saddle the apostles with the tyranny of the urgent, which showed up in tangible problems, would be akin to removing the very heart of the church to leave out prayer, or to diminish prayer and to diminish preaching.

The apostles were declaring that they must be devoted to prayer and the ministry of the words. They don't want to be distracted from this primary role.

This is the challenge of everyone in ministry, prioritizing the most important things. For everyone, it is easy to busy and run through the week, doing good things and failing to pray even one time. Prayer is at the heart of pastoral ministry. Everything begins and ends in prayer, yet it is the easiest thing to be sacrificed. And let's all be honest.

[39 : 26] Would you be distinguished as a person of prayer, or is praying your praying leg shorter than your ministry leg? I recently read of John Stott, who passed away in 2011.

He is a British Anglican pastor and theologian. He had an incredible mind. John Stott kept a prayer book that had over a thousand names in it to which he prayed for regularly.

Furthermore, he wrote his sermons on his knees, and he would pray over what he wrote. This convicts me, but what an example he is and provides for us all, especially those who are pastors, elders, and leaders.

What is wrong with prayerlessness is one of the greatest acts of independence we could perform. It indicates self-sufficiency, and it is a sign of pride.

It is a sign that we don't believe God acts when we pray. It is a sign that we don't love people as we ought. Let us be a church who repents of any such arrogance and stupidity, and saturates our lives and our ministries in times of intercession, thanksgiving, lament, petition, adoration, and confession.

[40 : 57] Let us work on cultivating vibrant prayer lives. Let me just share. About three or four times a year, we have a special prayer and praise service.

We invite the whole church to come. In these services, they are just meant to do two things. Let us honor and worship the Lord in praise and adoration, and let's seek Him in prayer.

Sometimes on a Sunday morning, because of the nature of the service, there just isn't extended time allocated to just pray. We just take evenings out of our year and say, would we do that?

Those happen about four times a year. The second thing that happens in those is it provides an opportunity to spotlight a person in the church that there is something about them that we would want you to know.

Whether that be they have a personal ministry, it's just a connection point. Second, there are two times that we pray weekly. More than that, there are some women's prayer meetings. All of these are on the church calendar. You can find them.

[42 : 06] But specifically, everyone is invited to Saturday night at 8.30. I lead a prayer time. I'm just on a Zoom call. It's an online prayer meeting, and we just pray.

Last night, I was with several men, and we were just praying together in our own houses, but praying with one another via Zoom. The hyperlink is on church center.

And then on Sunday mornings at 8 o'clock, beginning next week, it will be at 8 o'clock, the church just gathers to pray. And I just want to emphasize that as a church, that we want to be a people who devote ourselves to prayer and to pray for the body of Christ.

And thank you for those who are faithfully attend and or lead those meetings. I'm grateful for you. By the way, January 19th is our first prayer and praise service on a Wednesday night. You can come join us.

Okay. Done with the advertisements.

[43 : 18] Please understand the heart, what the apostles were not saying. In saying we're going to devote ourselves to the word of God in prayer, they are not saying we are too good or too important to care for widows.

They were simply demonstrating a commitment to biblical priorities. I want to camp here because this is often misunderstood and this requires an understanding church.

There is an old paradigm that thankfully is being weeded out, but requires constant intention even in our day. There is an unspoken paradigm that is expressed on occasion that is deadly and will kill pastors.

It will ruin their families and the church will reap the fruit of their resignation. And this is what I want to say it is that pastors and elders must be at every church event.

I want you please to turn with me to Ephesians chapter four. I would want your eyes to turn there with me if you don't mind before I speak any further.

[44 : 23] I want us to find the role of today's pastors and elders. What is their role? Ephesians four verse 11 and 12.

And he the Lord gave the apostles and the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, the teachers, the shepherds there is another word for pastors. And what is the role of these giftings in the church?

And keep in mind I'm not just including pastors here, the evangelists, the prophets, the teachers.

What is the role of these people in the function of a church? Their role is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up of the body.

The role of pastors and elders if they're doing their job, one of the functions, the chief of function of their is to equip saints. That the saints do the work of the ministry.

And verse 16 dropping down, from whom the whole body joined and knitted together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly makes the body grow and so builds itself up in love.

[45 : 41] It's beautiful. But one of the chief functions of pastor elder is to equip saints to do the work of the ministry. So when that paradigm is felt of the pastor elder must be at every church event, let's try not to have that paradigm.

And please know this could sound like, oh Scott, this is the way you can just say you don't have to be at anything and you don't want to be involved. And you know, you know this staff, we will be at everything we possibly can.

That's not what I'm saying. But let me share with you how I have felt that over the years. Have I felt this unspoken paradigm? Nobody overtly says that the pastor must be at everything.

But I have heard from someone after visiting and spending time with someone in the hospital, someone report to me that the patient in the hospital would like to see me.

Now I want you to know I'm humbled by that and you know that I have gone to many, many hospital visits. But when I hear that, this is what I said to that person, I am so sorry.

[46 : 56] And they looked at me and said why? And I said, I am so sorry that this person doesn't value your ministry as equal to mine. I'm sorry.

That's hurtful. If someone visits you in the hospital, they took time out of their day to visit you.

They are doing the work of the ministry. Let's receive that. That's oh, so important. I once went to a church work day and there were over 70 something people who showed up planting trees, planting annuals in the flower beds, spreading mulch, doing all kinds of work in and outside of the church.

Over 70 people showed up. One person asked me where Pastor So-and-So was and my response was, I'm sorry, he's preaching this coming Sunday and he had a busy week and so he's finishing up his sermon today.

This person responded with, well, why didn't he get it done during the week? Why couldn't he be here today? So I thought, okay, how do I shepherd this in this moment and try to work on this

paradigm with this person?

[48 : 21] And so I said, what I think would be helpful for you is to apologize to every person that is here today, all 70 of them.

And they looked at me as if what are you getting at? Because I said, I think it's very sad that you think so little value of ministry of everyone else who is here.

So when I hear those kind of comments, oh, I want us to so value one another that you are the most important person. The person who's caring for our children is the most important person sharing Jesus with our kids.

The person who greets me at the door is the most important person who greeted me that day. The person who helped me find a little communion cup or something and handed me a worship folder was so important.

The person who prepared coffee, the person who teaches God's word, they all have equal value. Please, when I hear those comments, I get a little nervous and I think, oh Lord, help us value one another.

[49 : 41] Okay, I'm going to finish with this, growing pains. We should celebrate gospel-centered church growth. We should expect problems when church grows and we should anticipate the lost coming to faith in Christ.

Look with me in verse 6 and 7. And they set before the apostles and they prayed, lay hands on them to those who are delegated, those seven men, to delegate this responsibility, to commission them into this in verse 7 and the word of God to continue to increase.

And the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem and a great many priests became obedient to faith. Look, there's three things that are growing. The word of God increases, the number of disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem and priests came obedient to the faith.

This is the first time that someone in the religious establishment leadership is mentioned as having come to faith in Christ. And keep in mind where was the location where they were often preaching up on the Temple Mount.

This is where they often were. This is where the priests would have been frequenting and so many of them had overheard the gospel. And keep in mind they went to the temple and they went house to house preaching and proclaiming the word.

[51 : 03] So church, what are my final encouragements today is this. Let us seek the salvation of everyone. The gospel penetrates even the hardest of hearts. Let us celebrate gospel centered growth.

Let us have realistic expectations of one another's and leaders. Let us show grace to one another and believe the best in one another. Let us remember that there is a difference between sin and human limitations.

Let us play as a team. If you're a Christian, you're a player, not a fan. So let's all participate in the mission. Let us express gratitude to those who serve, who greet, who are in the sound and technology booth.

Those who lead worship, those who share Jesus with children, those who minister in their workplace, in their school. And through it all, let us remember that Jesus is building his church and we are wonderfully privileged to be a part of it.

Father, thank you so much for this passage where we see this delegation of responsibility and the criticalness of every member doing its part.

[52 : 19] We thank you for these seven men and perhaps the incipient form of the Deacon Ministry beginning. Lord, we thank you that the apostles had a primacy and they didn't rip out the heart of ministry of keeping themselves devoted to the Word of God in prayer.

May we be a church that is devoted such, especially for those of us in leadership. We love you Lord. We're humbled.

We want to know you more and it's in your name Jesus. Amen.