

# The Basement Matters More Than You Know

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Preacher: Walt Alexander

[ 0 : 00 ] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! Acts 6. So we've made it through five whole chapters of this 28 chapter book. So we'll be here for at least another five years. So Acts 6. I'm going to begin reading in verse 1.

Acts 6 verse 1. 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 twelve, this apostle, 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 from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

[ 1 : 17 ] Verse 4. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. And when they said, 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, and Nicanor, and Teman, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch.

These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid hands on them. Verse 7. And 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. That is God's authoritative and sufficient word.

Well, last year, my wife and I and our family moved to Athens. Now, you probably know that. But once we decided to move, the hunt for a house began.

[ 2 : 28 ] We owned a home in Knoxville, and we needed to own a home. We needed a place for us in Athens. And we began checking the house selling websites, the realty websites, day after day, and making a list.

We crunched the numbers. We found a realtor, and we began to look. Now, as you know, I know all houses look different in person than they do in pictures.

Some looked much smaller. Some looked much larger. And so we wanted to see them. You know, we wanted to walk around in them. We wanted to imagine ourselves living in them.

We wanted to walk around the kitchen and see how much room there really was in there. We wanted to see the bedrooms. You know, we wanted to walk the perimeter of the yard, walk the backyard, and see what it was like.

You know, we wanted to see if the house was warm and inviting. We wanted a home, right? Now, some houses we crossed off quickly. In some houses, we began to really like.

[ 3 : 32 ] At this point, once we found one we really liked, or maybe we walked to the house for 30 minutes or so, and we asked all our questions, and we found this one that we really liked, I would always ask the realtor, how do you get to the basement?

Now, there's a lot of things I don't care about when it comes to a basement. I don't care if you enter from the inside or the outside. I don't care whether it's more of a crawl space or one of those things you can walk around in.

I don't care whether there's lights or not. I don't care whether it's inviting or not, but I do want it to look and smell like a basement. I want it to be cold, like a basement.

I want it to be dry. You know, I want some dust in the basement. I want that vapor barrier. That's what somebody told me it was, that little plastic sheet that runs across the basement.

So more than once in the houses we visited, I crawled the whole basement the day we visited to look and make sure it was dry, to make sure there was no signs of water.

[ 4 : 36 ] And some we crossed off. I mean, I want it to be straight, right? I want it to see lots of concrete and solid footage. I want it to see the straight line of joists and of floorboards.

You know, the house may be warm and inviting, but if the basement's wet, you're in trouble. The house may be beautiful, but if its footers and foundations aren't solid, you better watch out.

You know, a lot about house hunting is all about our feelings, if we're honest. It's all about how we feel when we walk through the house. But when we get into the basement, we need cold, hard facts. This morning, in our passage, it's as if God is taking us into the basement of a healthy church. This whole section that we've been studying from Acts 3 through this passage, Acts 6-7, has been talking about the spread of the word and the growth of the church in Jerusalem.

They haven't left their hometown. And they're all here, and the word is spreading. And while the Jewish faith revolves around priests, sacrifices in the temple, Jesus is building a new thing.

[ 5 : 46 ] He's building a church. The book of Acts is about what God or what Jesus is doing from heaven on earth and what he's doing in this passage is building a church.

And so tucked into our passage and tucked into this story is a look in the basement of the church. It will continue to be developed and clarified. But here we see concrete and footers. Here we see straight lines. Here we see organization.

Here we see roles and responsibilities. You know, this text and this passage might fit better for the construction guys or the people that love the details because in this passage it's unfolding for us the details behind a healthy church.

And where we're going is a church is built on the word, and the word builds the church. The church is built on the word. It's established on the word. It is founded by the word of God.

[ 6 : 46 ] And the word builds it up. Point one is elders are servant leaders. Elders are servant leaders. Throughout Acts and the rest of the New Testament, the church is said to be led or is commanded to be led by servant leaders.

We see this in 1 Peter 5, which we have for you. So I exhort the elders among you, Peter writing, shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you, not for shameful gain, but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

And so you see that servanthood threading through there, that it's to be willingly, eagerly, being examples. This is straight from our Lord's playbook, who says in Matthew 20, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them, but it shall not be so among you.

For whoever would be great must be your servants. Leaders in the church are to be servants. They're to look, smell, and sound like Jesus, who came not to serve, or not to be served, but to serve.

And the New Testament teaches us that these servant leaders are pastors and elders. And each local church is to be led by a group of them.

[ 8 : 19 ] That's what we see in and through the New Testament. They're to be led by elders, plural. So in Acts 14, when Paul goes through these different cities, he said he appoints elders, plural, in every city.

And Philippians 1, which we saw that first week last year, when Paul wrote to the Philippians, he greeted the elders, plural, and the deacons.

But how are these elders to lead? What are pastors called to do? You know, our culture rushes forward with the answer, and I know that because I'm a pastor, and so I know what our culture says. We're called to be entrepreneurs, managers, therapists, you know, hand-patting therapists, or something like that. We're called to be fundraisers, called to be community organizers.

But these verses point to a very different answer and give us a very different picture. Pastors are called to be prayers and word preachers.

[ 9 : 21 ] Prayers and word preachers. Look closely back down there with me. You know, the apostles are preaching the word, as I talked about, in Jerusalem, and the people are being added to the church, and many native Aramaic-speaking Jews are being added, but also Hellenists are being added.

That's the ones that were widows, or some of them were widows, and they were being added. Hellenists just means a Greek-speaking Jew. And so the gospel's going forward, and it's obviously going forward, these Aramaic-speaking Jews in Jerusalem, but it's also going forward, these Greek-speaking Jews in Jerusalem, and there's a little bit of a tiff there between them.

I mean, a lot of it's a love fest, as we talked about in Acts 2 and 4. They're just sharing everything they have. They're eating with one another. They're worshiping. They're going to one another's houses, just partying with one another, sharing their money with one another.

But a complaint arises among these Greek-speaking Jews and said their widows are being neglected in the daily distribution.

So the idea is that the apostles, they collected money from the church, and there was a daily distribution for whatever person needed. It might have included money, but it might have also just included food or something completely material.

[10:42] And so the apostles must decide what to do. These needs must be met, but who should meet them? And here the text reads more like a board meeting where responsibilities are divvied out than a story.

Look down there in verse 2. He said, The twelve summoned the full number of the disciples, and they said, It's not right that we should give up preaching the word to serve tables. Verse 4.

We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. Now, this is a fascinating passage because while the need is great, the apostles say, We must not neglect prayer and preaching.

We will continue to serve, but through the ministry of the word. Literally what that means is through the service of the word. So we're going to continue to serve, but we're going to serve in a different way.

Now, there's massive implications from this little text, but one of them is the apostles, who are the first elders of the church, lay the groundwork for the primary way pastors and elders are to lead the church.

[11:56] They're to pray. They're to preach. I love it. They're to pray. Their ministry does not begin with their words, but with dependence upon God, and they are to preach.

2 Timothy 4 gets right to the point when it says, I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is the judge of the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom, that's quite an introduction, preach the word.

Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching. John Piper similarly says, the word of God that saves and sanctifies from one generation, from generation to generation, is preserved in a book.

Therefore, at the heart of every pastor's work is book work. Call it reading, meditation, reflection, cogitation, study, exegesis, whatever you will.

A large and central part of our work is to wrestle God's meaning from a book and proclaim it in the power of the Spirit. I think he gets right at it, right?

[13:06] Elders are servant leaders who pray and preach. And this fascinating passage that divvies up responsibilities in the early church and sets the foundation for the church of Jesus Christ.

It says, elders are called to pray and preach. But don't be confused. Elders are to be servant leaders who preach not from the ivory tower, but from the hospital.

Elders are to preach, not with the head of a teacher, but the heart of a pastor. That's why they're all in one. Elder.

Pastor. Timothy Laniak, probably a name you don't know, he's an author of a number of books I've read about shepherding.

So you guys know, I mean, shepherding's a massive metaphor in our Bibles. The Lord is our shepherd. We shall not want, right? The Lord called shepherds throughout. That's what we see in different parts of the prophets, called shepherds to lead God's people.

[14:19] God is a shepherd. And Timothy Laniak has written some books on shepherding that I've really enjoyed reading. And he wanted to understand what it meant to be a shepherd. He didn't want to write from the ivory tower, so to speak.

He wanted boots on the ground. So he moved to the Middle East for a year to spend time up close with Bedouin shepherds.

And he tells the story of interviewing one shepherd. I wish I could tell you a number of stories that he tells in this. But for the sake of time, I can't. But he tells one. He said he was sitting with this shepherd one afternoon overlooking his sheep.

He had several thousand sheep. He said, you know, you don't really have a right to be in this business unless you have a heart for it.

And he continues, I'm not going to let my sons inherit my family business.

[ 15 : 20 ] That was several thousand sheep, more than enough for more than a few sons. He says, my sons don't deserve the flock. They don't have a heart for it.

I spend my days every day out here, and I don't have to, but I do it because I care about them. This is probing.

He says, my sons don't. I can tell. They are preoccupied. They want to do other things. Now, that may not mean a lot to you, but I think that captured it.

That's a shepherd. That's an elder. That's a pastor. You know, a pastor ought not be someone who couldn't do anything else. A pastor must be someone who won't do anything else because he has a heart for it.

That's a man who will pray, and that's a man who is fit to preach. So since we're down in the basement, I'm going to give you a little basement info.

[ 16 : 25 ] You know, right now, as you know, or many of you know, our little church plant, just past a year, is led by three elders.

Two of them are on a provisional basis. That means they're on loan. We don't want them forever, but we do like them. Jeff Hodgson and Mike Pluniac, they're both close friends and solid elders of Cornerstone Church, where I was for 10 plus years.

And me. So that's what makes three. Jeff, Mike, and me. And in the months and years ahead, I'm trusting God to raise up more men to pastor us.

But I want men that are like that. We're a young church, but may God protect us and allow no man who doesn't have a heart for it to serve as an elder here.

Amen. So the church is built on the word and the word builds the church through servant leaders who pray and preach. Two, deacons are lead servants.

[ 17 : 33 ] Deacons are lead servant. So the church is to be led by servant leaders and lead servants. So, you know, if we go back to the story, the complaint arises among the Hellenists, hey, we've been neglected in this daily distribution.

And so the apostles determined what must happen. Look down in verse three. So we read about what they said, but this is what they said they must do. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute.

That's just a good reputation. Full of the spirit and of wisdom who we will appoint to this duty. Now, there's a lesson here that's obvious, but I must underline it.

You know, while we must preach, we must not preach the word or preach the gospel and use words if necessary. We also must not preach the gospel and use works or add works if necessary.

Right preaching leads to right living. True hearing leads to doing. And I just love this. The apostles say, we must not stop preaching, but we must not neglect these ladies.

[ 18 : 40 ] We must not neglect these widows. And you know this as well, but in a patriarchal society where men owned the property and they voted, they held power, they were the educated one, widows were one of the, if not the, most impoverished groups of people.

And the church is just known. One of these books I was reading this week, it's massive, but it was talking about, and that's not trying to get any kudos or anything like that, but it's interesting, you know, in its backstory.

And one of the things it said is, first century and second century writers were marveled, they marveled at the way the church attracted and cared for people who had nothing.

I just love that. That's the way Jesus builds his church. He did not come through a kingdom. John the Baptist was out there in the wilderness and he was crazy because that's the way Jesus builds with crazy people.

Amen. We fit right in there. But so, so, so they, they point seven men, they pray for them, they lay hands on them, they call them to serve tables.

[ 19 : 48 ] Look down in verse six, he says, these they set before the apostles and they prayed, they laid hands. That's just a way of, of, of, of, of solemnly and prayerfully putting them into ministry.

And they sent them out to serve. Now, now these men in this text are not called deacons. So if you're, if you're wordsmithing, which some guys are, they argue about that, but this has nothing to do with deacons.

I would argue back. I think these men, they are called to serve in several different places, but they're the prototype. I think what we're seeing here is the first example.

We're seeing the mold. We're seeing the pattern after which the early church models. We're seeing deacons 1.0. We're seeing the first iteration. Deacons continue to develop.

Now this is fascinating. The Bible is not, it was written, or the New Testament was written over a period of time and Acts was one of the earliest books and it was collected over a period of time.

[ 20 : 51 ] And so, so later when Paul writes from Rome to Philippi, he greets the elders and deacons because by that point, they had become office holders in the church of Jesus Christ. I find that so neat.

But what are deacons called to do? How are deacons called to lead? Again, we're in the org chart today. They're, they're servants. Deacon literally means servant.

They're, they're not called to teach. They're not called to exercise oversights. They're not called to govern in the way the elder is. They're not called to pastor.

They're called to, in this text, they're called to serve tables. I think the idea is that the elders are to be word proclaimers and deacons are to be word doers. Elders are called to the service of the word and deacons are called quite literally here to the service of serving.

Deacons are lead servants. But, you know, and next week, we're going to dive into 1 Timothy 3 and we're going to study deacons into greater detail as we contemplate deacons for us as a church.

[ 22 : 01 ] But, but for right now, I just want us to take this picture in. as the word bears fruit and gathers people, all sorts of needs arise and deacons are deployed to bring order and unity.

Deacons are like God who, who brought order out of chaos. Deacons are fixers. I think I'm a breaker. You know, I mean, I, I get something that needs fixing.

I just soon throw it away because there's no fixing that's going to happen when it comes into my hands. But, but deacons are attracted to problems. You ever hear somebody, you know people like that.

They're just attracted to problems. They hear of help needed or of heat going out or something like that. They, they love a finished job, a mowed lawn. I just soon bail that mess.

You know, they love an organized cabinet, a well-ordered meeting. They love to help and they serve the church by coming alongside the elders to meet the needs of the church and bring unity.

[ 23 : 10 ] Where there's disunity, they come to bring unity. Where there's disorder, they've come to bring order. Where there's chaos, they come to bring help.

And I just find this so interesting. One of the offices, there's two offices in the church of Jesus Christ, elder and deacon. And one of them is reserved for servants.

There's no office for the wealthy. Who cares? There's no office for the powerful. There's no office for the movers and shakers.

There's no office, thank the Lord, for the best looking. But there's an office for those who empty themselves to serve. There's an office reserve for men with worn out jeans, calloused hand, careful thinking, and compassionate, heartbreaking hearts.

And I love that. Deacons are just those types of people. And we as a church, you know, as we grow, we're just this little organism that's kind of growing and maybe shooting out some limbs in different places.

[ 24 : 16 ] And hopefully not too many. But as we grow, we want deacons put in place because we want to be as healthy as possible. We want our foundation to be solid.

We want us to be a healthy church, bearing fruit in every way. The church is built on the Word. The Word builds the church through lead servants who lead us in doing the Word.

Point three, all disciples are servants of the Word. All disciples are servants of the Word.

Threading through this passage is an emphasis on the Word of God. You probably saw it. Down there in verse 2, we should not give up preaching the Word of God. Down there in verse 4, we will devote ourselves to prayer in the ministry of the Word.

Verse 7, we'll read that, and the Word of God continued to increase. And the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.

[ 25 : 17 ] I think the idea is elders are Word preachers, deacons are Word doers, and the effect of their labor is increase of the Word. Now, that's very fascinating to me, that the Word of God, they said, Luke said, continues to increase.

It grows. The Word bears fruit. It spreads. It's alive.

I think that someone who is all talk is useless to us, but God's all talk gets work done. We know this. The Lord spoke, and the heavens and the earth burst into existence, and the Lord has been speaking and working ever since.

And it is this Word and through this Word that the Lord still speaks. I find it so interesting that the Word of God began to increase because the Word of God still speaks wherever it goes.

Now, it does not speak in the way like grandmother's old letters to you speak. They give you that warm, fuzzy feeling, or they don't speak because they're just some old stories that remind us of the good old times or something like that or just stay in the same old, same old thing.

[ 26 : 31 ] The idea is the Word is living and active. As Hebrews says, it's sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing the soul to the division of soul and spirit, joint and marrow, able to discern the thoughts and tension of the heart from afar.

The Word of God goes forth through the earth to bring people to Christ. It addresses you. This Word has something to say to me and to you.

It tells us what God is like. It tells us what He thinks, what He loves, what He hates, what He wants. It speaks into the darkness of our heart and awakens us to life. It's jam-packed with stories, all these stories, so that we can see that our Lord is that Lord and He reigns over all with the same faithfulness, goodness, wisdom, and love.

If you want to know who God is, don't go into a field. Go into the Word. It's right there. It is the Word of God. It's not merely truth about Him, but an invitation to relate to Him, to know Him, to have fellowship with Him.

We talk to our friends because we want to know Him. We've got to know things about Him in order to know them, so we ask where they're from. What do they do? What do they like? God's Word is all here so that you might know Him.

[ 27 : 46 ] People say it's a love letter. Maybe. Yeah, it's something like a love letter. It creeps me out a little bit, but the idea is it's a letter, it's a book asking you to come to Him, most specifically in Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15, 3 says, Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures. The Word of God is not this book that's kind of pieced together over centuries in a way that was haphazard and awkward or something like that.

The Word of God is packed together and centered around Jesus Christ, about who He is, about what He came to do. It's the Word that if you preach it, has the power to rescue someone from sin and death and restore them rightly to God.

And if the Word of the Gospel in a nutshell is God made Christ who knew no sin, had no evil in Him, was without sin in every way, God made Him to be sin.

God laid upon Him the sin. When He stood there and hung there between two criminals on the cross for sins He did not commit, God set Him there so that He might pour out His wrath on Jesus Christ for all those who would trust in Him.

[ 29 : 15 ] And the idea is that if you'll trust in Jesus Christ, if you'll say, I believe that this man didn't just die for sinners but He died for me, you will receive eternal life.

That is the Word of God that goes forth in truth. May God help us to hide in Him.

And so this Word's alive. I love the way the Apostle Paul said it when he was writing. He said, the Word's not bound. He was writing from prison. He was in Rome. He was bound.

He said, I don't even care because the Word's not bound. It does whatever it wants to do. It goes wherever it wants to go. Colossians 1, Paul says, yeah, it's bearing fruit and increasing.

The Word is bearing fruit and increasing. I thought that's what we do. No, the Word is bearing fruit and increasing all over the world as it did among you. So it continues to do. Martin Luther said it like this.

[ 30 : 10 ] I simply taught, preached, or wrote God's Word. And what he means by that is translated God's Word. So I don't think he's trying to add to the Scriptures. I simply taught, preached, or wrote God's Word.

Otherwise, I did nothing. And while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy, that's the Pope's, that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it.

I did nothing. The Word did everything. If you know anything about Luther, he would not fit in in McMahan County, but this is the way he thinks. I did nothing.

The Word did it all. That's the story of Acts. Acts 6-7 is just this refrain that's repeated through the book. The book, the Word increased and multiplied.

The Word increased and multiplied. The Word increased and multiplied. It's not a story of extraordinary men. It's a story of ordinary men holding an extraordinary Word. It's alive.

[ 31 : 10 ] No matter how dark today is, no matter how ashamed you feel, no matter how troubled your marriage is, no matter how overwhelming your life is, mark my Word.

The Word that brought you to life will bring you home. Sanctify them in the truth, Jesus prayed. Your Word is true. The Word increases and makes disciples. We think about discipleship one-on-one, you know, let me mentor you.

No, it's the Word makes disciples. If you remember Acts 5, Gamaliel was right. If this thing, if this movement, whatever God is doing, if this is of God, then you will not be able to overthrow it.

Indeed, that's what's going on in Jerusalem. Persecution, conflict, deceit, human weakness, administration, nothing will stop the advance of God's Word. It continues to bear fruit, to increase, and to make disciples.

[ 32 : 19 ] go and speak the words of this life. Disciples are not made by fireworks or fog machines, powerful people or persuasive preachers, warm feelings or worship songs.

Disciples are made through the words of this life. The Word of God makes disciples and makes servants of the Word. They're hearers and doers.

You know, pregnancy is such a hard, uncomfortable season for husbands. First comes the ultrasound and then the hot flashes and the midnight cravings where husbands have to endure more chocolate and late night burgers with their wives and then are the pillows.

You know, the pillows just begin to accumulate in the bed. I hear husbands are barely asleep because they're hanging by the mattress trying not to fall out and then wondering if their wife will ever emerge from these pillows.

Obviously, y'all didn't have too many pillows in your room but we had tons and I've heard the pregnancy and then the delivery. That's the worst part. Some husbands pass out. Not going to point any fingers.

[ 33 : 43 ] I've heard of some nearly dying watching their wife go through all that and if that weren't enough, when the baby comes, the hard, uncomfortable season continues.

Hate to break this to you. Oh sure, babies are cute and cuddly, right? They're wonderful little creatures but life as you knew it is over. You are no longer footloose and fancy free.

You are ruled by an eight pounder with a passy. You might think you're in charge but your life as you know it is centered around this little eight pound baby.

If I can make this work in a similar way, when we come to Christ, our life's all about the word. It's all about the word.

I will never forget this summer I took my kids back to the camp where I was converted and they were able to show them the room. Not that it was like some site but it was a friend's house I stayed at where I first began reading the New Testament.

[ 34 : 55 ] Well, that's never been the same. I can remember those reading Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and these words just jumping off the page telling me about a friend, a friend of sinners that is now my friend in Jesus Christ.

And that is the wonderful promise we have as Christians. Charles Spurgeon says visit many good works, good books but live in the Bible. Visit many good books but live in the Bible.

Be centered on it. Make your life all about it. You know, they said of John Bunyan that his blood bled bib line.

Spurgeon said, you know, if you find a man whose Bible is falling apart you'll find a soul that's not. We need the word of God as disciples, as servants.

You know, the point is not to master this book and try to know all the kings and know them all in order or something like that. The point is to raise it up and be mastered by it. The Lord might use it to shape us more and more into Jesus Christ.

