

ACTS 6:1-7

INTRODUCTION

- You ever noticed that the more people you put under one roof, the more complicated life gets?
 - When it's just you—quiet.
 - Add a roommate—adjustments.
 - Add a spouse—complications.
 - Add a kid or two—chaos.
 - Add more—you're praying for the second coming of Jesus before breakfast.
- Family is a gift, but it's not simple.
 - Life in the early church was the same way.
 - God's family is growing—fast.
 - And just like any family—things start to get messy.
 - As we arrive in Acts 6, new challenges have come.
 - But we're also given a beautiful picture of how to navigate them.
 - Let's paint this picture with three observations from our text.

[Transition]: The first thing we see is **reality**—the reality of challenges in the life of the church...

REALITY (V1)

[State]

V1: Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number...

- Notice these challenges arise as the church is growing.
 - Growth is good.
 - But growth also brings problems!
- Last week I ran into a family in the parking lot.
 - They're expecting another child...
 - And this new wee one will push them into needing a new category of car.
 - There was a day when you could just squash them all in the back.
 - Now that's frowned upon—everyone must have their own seat.
- Challenges come with growth—so here...

...a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

- We've seen that the early church shared all their resources.

- This wasn't a primitive form of communism—nothing was compulsory and no one was taxed!
- Instead, it was a sign that they viewed themselves as one family—God is their Father, they are all siblings in Christ, and they share the same Holy Spirit—like shared DNA inside.
- But as the family grows—this shared family life gets complicated.
 - A complaint arises between two ethnic groups:
 - **Hellenists:** Greek speaking believers—many of whom would have moved to Jerusalem from other areas.
 - **Hebrews:** Hebrew speaking believers—many of whom would have been native to Jerusalem.
 - Now, differences in language and culture spill into the church.
 - The Hellenists feel their widows are being neglected in the daily distribution.
 - Remember back in chapter 4...
 - People would lay money at the apostles' feet, who would then distribute it those in need.
 - Well, now these Greek speakers complain, "Their widows are being treated better than our widows."
 - N. T. Wright points out, "*Nobody had planned for a complex and intricate welfare system. It had been invented on the hoof, when there were other things (such as persecution by authorities) to think about. It would be surprising if such a system could proceed without difficulties.*"¹
- And indeed there are difficulties:
 - It's **practical**—how do we care for all the widows?
 - But it's also **personal**—why do you care more about them than us?
 - There are **layers** to it—and it all feels a little thorny.
- This, too, is the church at its best.

[Apply]

- Don't be too surprised and don't be too discouraged when challenges arise in the church.
 - Complaints and conflicts, difficulties and misunderstandings—they happened in the early church, and they still happen today.
 - It's normal. Ordinary. Routine.
- Why? Because we're human!
 - In your own **family**, disagreements pop up.
 - With **friends**, expectations collide.
 - At **work**, misunderstandings happen.
 - This week, one of our elders said: "My job would be easy if I didn't have any clients or staff."
 - We can all relate!
 - And yes—as it is with family, friends, and work—so it is in the **church**.

- Why? Because we're human.
- The only way to get rid of all conflict would be to get rid of all the people.
 - Then I'd be here all alone... only guess what?
 - Sometimes I find ways to disagree with myself!
- We don't expect the perfection from each other that belongs to God alone.
 - Which means we make peace with the reality...
 - Challenges come.

[Transition]: So, the church isn't different bc we don't have challenges. What makes us different is—point 2—how we **respond**.

RESPONSE (VV2-6)

[State]

- Several things stand out in the apostles' response to this challenge:
 1. **V2: The twelve summoned the full number of the disciples.**
 - They get everyone together in the same place—face to face.
 - This issue is important to them and they're going to deal with it.
 - Identifying the challenge isn't enough—they're going to work on it, address it, solve it.
 2. **V2: It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.**
 - They care deeply about the issue, but they also keep their focus.
 - Saying "yes" to one thing always means saying "no" to another—and they refuse to say no to the word and prayer.
 - They're going to solve this—but not in a way that distracts from the mission.
 - Don't let solving problems become the mission.
 - Solve them so you can advance the mission.
 3. **V3: 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.**
 - You see what they're doing?
 - Delegation!
 - It's the unglamorous, unromantic work of organizational leadership.
 - And notice two things about who they pick:
 - They prioritize **substance**: **V3: Men of good repute, full of the Spirit and wisdom.** Character matters most.
 - They're also **strategic**:
 - Do you see the list of names in **V5**?

- Stephen, Philip, and the rest.
 - These are not Hebrew names. They're Greek.
 - Do you see what they're up to? The apostles intentionally raise up leaders from the Hellenist group—the very ones who feel overlooked—making them part of the solution and building trust within the family.
- Overall, it's a thoughtful, loving, wise response!

[Apply]

- So often when challenges arise—emotions run high, tensions enflame, and we respond in ways that makes things worse.
 - I'm sorry to say I can think of many times when I've done that—as a man and as a pastor.
 - Challenges have a way of bringing out the ugly things that are in us.
- That's one of the reasons character is so important in leadership.
 - This week, I had to have a hard conversation.
 - I was preparing for it, and I was unsettled in my spirit.
 - So I asked the HS to give me a picture to change my heart.
 - I started to journal: Lord, help—untangle this knot...
 - And then the Spirit gave me the picture I needed.
 - I found myself writing down the names of my sons—Caleb, Seamus, Chris.
 - And then I found myself writing: “Make me the man I would want them to see me being.”
 - In other words, make me less of myself.
 - Make me more like Christ.
 - I don't know if I succeeded, but look at the apostles—they do:
 - In response to this challenge, they're not defensive, divisive, or dismissive—they don't fall into frustration or withdrawal.
 - Instead, they lead with humility, wisdom, and love.
- And it's a superb model for us as we address challenges—in our lives and church.
 - Challenges come whether you want them or not—but a Christlike response is a choice.
 - You don't always get to choose the hand you're dealt, but you do get to choose how you play it.
- So, when something goes wrong, when there's a difficulty, when tensions rise—here's a question we can all ask: *Am I responding to this in a way that makes things better or worse?*
- I want that in my life—and I want that for our church.

[Transition]: Lastly, to encourage us to choose the right response, our passage closes by showing us the **result**.

RESULT (V7)

[State]

V7: 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.

- The right response results in growth—*God uses healthy conflict to grow his church.*
 - Multitudes continue to turn to Christ.
 - And now a great many of the priests also come to faith.
 - God uses these challenges as a gateway to draw new categories of people to himself.
 - Even those who were once in opposition start turning to Christ.
- Here we see the judo of God at work.
 - Satan hates the church—and division is one of his tactics to stop us in our tracks. (That’s a sobering thought.)
 - So God foils his evil schemes by using challenges to draw people to him.

[Apply]

- This is so helpful to remember when challenges come.
 - Satan is happy about them.
 - But God can use them to grow his church.
- We navigate challenges so differently when we remember that.
 - We stop fighting each other.
 - And we start to fight for the kingdom—together.
- Here’s the invitation:
 - When challenges come—lift your eyes, focus on the bigger picture, and get curious about how God is at work.
 - That’s a perspective shift we need—when challenges come, it’s easy to get fixated on what’s wrong, rather than on what God might be doing through it.

[Illustrate]: One pastor tells the story of visiting the Sistine Chapel.²

- He’d been winding his way through the long, slow line—pressed shoulder to shoulder with a group of high school students on a field trip.
- When they finally entered the chapel, some of the students were glued to their phones, while others were whispering, even arguing about something.
- He said he wanted to shout: “Look up!”
 - Michelangelo’s ceiling, every panel bursting with color, telling the story of creation and redemption.
 - You’re missing it! The beauty is right above you!
- So it is in the kingdom of God...
 - We get distracted:
 - By the challenges and squabbles that come with being human.
 - Heads down—focused on what’s wrong or who said what.
 - When right above us is the masterpiece of God...

THE CLOSE

- In your **marriage**—look up!
 - Don't fight your spouse...
 - Use the challenge as an opportunity to grow closer to God.
- In your **friendships**—look up!
 - Don't make them your enemy...
 - Use the challenge as an opportunity to grow in love.
- In your **job**—look up!
 - Don't write people off...
 - Use the challenge as an opportunity to bring God's kingdom to earth.
- And in the **church**—look up!
 - Don't give Satan the satisfaction of division...
 - Use the challenge as an opportunity to see God grow his church.

CONCLUSION

- Where do we get the power to do this?
- Of course the answer is Christ.
 - When we look up, we see a God who looked down...
 - He saw sinners, enemies—and sent his Son.
 - God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (**Rom 5:8**).
 - While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son (**Rom 5:10**).
 - God took the **reality** of sin and **responded** with grace. As a **result**—we have been saved.
- And this love—the love God has given to us—we can now give to others.
 - When challenges come—look up!
 - He invites us to consider his work—his masterpiece.
 - And, in some mysterious way, he also hands us a brush—inviting us to join him in painting beauty out of brokenness.
 - Are you facing a challenge this week?
 - In your marriage, your friendships, your job, or your church?
 - Don't waste it.
 - Make it an opportunity to be...

The church at its best.

RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles*.
- Ray Cortese, *The Mission: Clarified, Mobilized, Empowered*.
- Dennis E. Johnson, *The Message of Acts in the History of Redemption*.
- Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Acts*.
- Alan Thompson, *Acts: A Commentary*.
- N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone*.

Endnotes

¹ N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone—Part 1*, 98.

² See Leo Schuster, *Service in Christ*, accessed [here](#) on 11/6/25.