

Acts 6

Serving In The Church

Learning Objectives

- To see how the early church used their gifts
- To learn about how we can use our gifts in the church and in our small groups

Steps to Prepare (For Leaders)

- Read Acts 6, Romans 12:3-13, and possibly 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.
- Think about the areas where God has gifted you.
- Think about the areas where God has gifted the members of your small group.

Pray to open your time together as a group.

Read Out Loud: Acts 6:1-7 (NIV)

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.

'Hellenist' is another word for 'Greek'. The 'Hellenistic Jews' were ethnic Jews who had adopted many aspects of Greek culture and way of life. In the centuries after the exile, many Jews moved throughout the area and came to learn and accept Greek customs and practices. These customs and people eventually made their way back to Jerusalem. Many Jews thought these customs and practices polluted the pure Jewish faith. While members of both of these groups came to see Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, it did not mean that they now agreed on the role of Greek culture within Christianity. As we see in the passage, the divisions they had before conversion carried over into their life after it.

? In verse one, it says that one group of people felt like they were being overlooked compared to another group of people. Why was this a concern for the apostles?

Possible Answers: The Gospel makes it clear that we are now not to see any of ourselves better or worse than anyone else because Jesus has done the same work in all of us. See Galatians 3:26-28 if you want to talk more about this in your group.

? Why do you think the apostles said it “would not be right” (vs.2) for them to fulfill the task of making sure the distribution of food was even?

Possible Answer: The Twelve are not saying that one task is more or less important. Instead, as we will see, it is because the church is made up of different people with different gifts and callings. The apostles’ calling was to preach and minister the Word of God; it would therefore not be right for them to a) not focus on their calling and gifting, and b) to deprive someone else with the gift of service from being able to act out their calling.

Read Out Loud: The apostles delegated the task of distributing food in order to focus on their gift of administering the Word. Let’s talk more about using spiritual gifts to serve within the church by reading Romans 12.

Read Out Loud: Romans 12:3-13 (NIV)

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ 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; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. ⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Leaders’ Note: This is one of several passages in the New Testament on the topic of spiritual gifts and not an exhaustive list. If you would like to read more, Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12 are two places to check out.

? *Leaders’ Note: This may seem like a “captain obvious” question, but we think it will be helpful for the group to list out ALL the different gifts mentioned.*

What are some of the different gifts that Paul talks about in this passage?

Possible Answers: Prophecy, service, teaching, encouragement, giving, leading, showing mercy.

? According to the passage, what are some of the reasons that God has distributed gifts?

Possible Answers: God has given us gifts so that we form one body of Christ, like a human body where there are many different functions. Through these gifts we can bless and cause others in the church to grow through love and service to each other and God.

? Read Romans 12:4-5 again. How do you see these verses playing out in Acts 6:1-7?

Possible Answers: The apostles are using their gifts of preaching and teaching and the Seven are using their gifts of service to wait on tables. Both are willing to focus on their own gifts and allowing the other members of the church to operate within their gifting, like an ear hearing and a tongue tasting.

? How have you seen different members of the body expressing their gifts at Hope?

Possible Answers: There are many examples! Pastors who preach, musicians who play, people who serve on hospitality, small group leaders who foster community and lead people through the Bible, small groups who volunteer to serve by cleaning the church in various ways, etc.

? It can be easy to compare the gifts we've been given to other people's gifts and feel that ours are less important. How do you fight this "gift envy" in your life or how would you help someone else fight it?

Possible Answers: Recognize that God created everyone with different gifts for a reason. Just like a body needs all of its parts to function properly, we need all the gifts to be used in the church in order for it to function properly (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

? What are some needs that you see in the church today that are similar to the needs of the Hellenistic Jews in Acts 6?

Possible Answers: Because Hope is so big, new people can have a harder time getting connected to the church body.

? What would it look like for your small group to come together and meet some of those needs at Hope?

Possible Answers: Join a hospitality team together, invite people to your small group, serve in the nursery once a month, etc.

For Discussion And Accountability

? What gifts has God given you? How can you use them to serve the body of Christ at Hope and in your small group?

Note: You may not necessarily know what your spiritual gifts are. According to Ephesians 4:1-13, we have all been given gifts by Jesus. If you would like to learn more about who you are and what gifts you have, we would encourage you to take Hope's SHAPE class or take this spiritual gifts assessment online: www.heartland.cc/sqa/discover-your-spiritual-gifts/

? How can we encourage each other to use the gifts we've been given in our small group and at Hope?

Additional Reading

Leaders' Note: If you'd like to, you can encourage your groups to read the rest of Acts 6. We will not be covering these verses in a specific study.

Acts 6:8-15 (NIV)

⁸ Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. ¹⁰ But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

¹¹ Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God."

¹² So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. ¹³ They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. ¹⁴ For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

¹⁵ All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.