**ACTS and US**

**Acts 6 – Called to Serve**

Early Acts:

1. Apostles were filled with power and began to preach
2. They met together and devoted themselves to 4 things:
   1. Apostle’s Teaching
   2. Fellowship
   3. Breaking Bread
   4. Prayer
3. They continued going to the Temple and Healed a man “In the name of Jesus”
4. They were then jailed and beaten and told to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, but continued to do it anyway.

*As a result the church grew rapidly (over 5,000 men plus families). They lived communally and were filled with the Holy Spirit’s power.*

There were all types of Jews coming to faith in Jesus. Hebrew-speaking Jews, Greek-speaking (Hellenistic Jews), Priests and many others. (not yet Gentiles, they come later in Acts 10).

As the church grew, so did the need for Organizational Leadership. There were both Practical and Spiritual needs that required management and the Apostles were beginning to form what we know as *church governance*, or structure in the church.

**Acts 6:1-15 “**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.

### Introducing Stephen, a man known for being a Deacon and the first martyr, but he was so much more…

**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.

Stephen became the first martyr of the church. He is usually listed as a Deacon, but he was so much more, he was a leader in the early church that was filled with God’s grace, power and wisdom. He was a used to perform powerful miracles (v. 8), he was an amazing apologist (v. 10) and he reached an powerful, prophetic, Old-Testament survey exegetical message just before he was stoned. (We will study this fully in Acts 7).

**Acts 6:3-4 “**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.”

This passage is often used to present the establishment of the offices of Deacon and Elder in the church. There are several references to these two roles;

Deacon – Server / Helper

Elder – Overseer

The one that is sited most often is “Deacon”. A Deacon traditionally is someone who serves the practical and administrative responsibilities within a church, whereas an Elder is more responsible for Teaching and Spiritual guidance. While these things are true, and are described in more detail in other parts of the New Testament, here in Acts chapter 6, there is no use of the word “*diakonos” (one who is a deacon), it is used in verb form “*diakonia” (serving)*.* Luke is simply writing about how the plan to meet the practical needs of the new church was put in place.

Today churches use the title “Deacon” in many different ways.

Some churches require ordination (I was ordained as a deacon once), others use it as a Title for ministers who have an official office in the church, but are not necessarily Pastors. (1st Timothy 3 gives the best explanation of what a Deacon is).

Some churches don’t use the term Deacon at all.

*[my friend’s church won’t use it because it sounds funny]*

One reason churches are reluctant to use the term deacon is because the word “Diakonos” basically means; “servant or helper”. And that is not just applicable to a select few.

The truth is that we are ALL to function in this way. There are not supposed to be spectators in the church who sit back and watch others do all the work. We ALL make up the church body and are all responsible for its care and welfare.

So each one of us is called to operate as servants and helpers to one another and the church.

**North Shore Fellowship Leadership: My hope is that God will raise up leaders from among you, who Guide and Govern this church in the future. But it’s important for all of us who lead, to first be identified as servants.**

*Jesus washed the apostle’s feet in John 13 as an example of servanthood, and told us that WE should follow His example and serve one another.*

When some apostles were jockeying for position of prominence, Jesus reminded them that we are all to be servants.

**Matt 20:25-28** “**25**Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **26**Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your **servant**, (Diakonos – Deacon)

**27**and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— **28**just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

[STORY]

When I first became a Pastor, I was part of a church plant. My ordaining Pastor made it clear that we as pastors were to set the example of servanthood in our congregation. SO as we planted the church, I found myself spending most of my time doing basic tasks like setting up and stacking chairs, making and folding bulletins, sweeping the floors, and anything else that was needed to do church ALONG with being on rotation to preach and lead worship. When we got our first building I was also laying carpet tile, scraping gum of the seats and painting the parking lot stripes - *they are still crooked : )*

I went on to become a pastor of a large church and spent my time mostly doing two things; Platform ministry and Staff leadership. When I went back to being a church planter, I got to feel the joy of being part of every area of responsibility again. (I Love It).

As the church grew these responsibilities were shared by those who came to join us, as they served they felt more a part of the church and received more joy and fulfillment as a result.

I discovered that;

“the rewards of investing *sweat-equity* into a church are joy, happiness and a sense of community and fulfillment that you cannot get by just being a spectator.”

* Serving in the church is the best way to enjoy your church experience.
* Those that serve are usually filled with joy and contagious positivity.
* Those who are reluctant to serve often find themselves feeling detached and unfulfilled in their church experience.

***“For it is in giving that we receive.”***

***Prayer of Saint Francis.“***

A close up of a map

Description automatically generated

**EXAMPLE: Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea.**

**One gives and receives and is full of life**

**The other only receives and is dead.**

**<map>**

**Back to Acts 6…**

As the early church was growing rapidly, the needs grew as well. There were spiritual needs that the apostles needed to devote their attention to fully. There were also practical needs that needed to be handled as well.

They divided the responsibilities of the church into a practical leadership and spiritual leadership. The “Deacons” were responsible for all of the *practical organizational responsibilities*, and the Elders were to give their attention to *“prayer and ministry of the Word”.*

However, the seven people who were selected for practical organizational leadership were “FULL OF THE SPIRIT AND WISDOM”.

This means that they were both spiritually gifted and had experience as well.

Other versions say “well-attested” or “good-reputation”.

I believe that God wants this to be said for *all of us*, and wants to use us all to build, care for, and administrate and serve this church.

That doesn’t just mean we all will just be waiting on tables and serving food, although it could include that *(I am grateful for those who do that for us here).*

But, for those who are “FULL OF THE SPIRIT AND WISDOM” there is SO MUCH for you to do.

They best way to discover what that is…

is to discover what your spiritual gifting is. God gives you gifts to do the very thing He wants you to do.

*Max Lucado - “The world will tell you that you can be anything you want to be and do anything you want to do, that is simply not true…*

*The good news is that you can be everything God wants you to be and do everything God wants you to do…and His plan for your life is spectacular”.*

I believe that knowing God’s purposes for your life and walking in them, is essentially the only way to have *fullness of joy* this side of heaven.

Max also said this: “The Happiest People are those who do *most*, what they do *best.”*

God has given each of us special gifts to use them to please Him, to serve the body and/or to reach the lost. When we find and use those gifts, we have fulfillment. Romans 12 tells us that Each of us is uniquely gifted by God. Acts tells us that God does not show partiality. Each person is *equally*, but *differently* gifted. *($5 analogy)*

*When you discover your God-given gift and use to serve him, you are resonating with the creator in the very purpose that you are created, and experience fullness of joy.*

*We are created for Worship, Serving the church and those in need, bringing others into relationship with God. Jesus said that He came to Seek and Save the lost. He left us with not only that responsibility, but that purpose.*

*“How do we do it?”*

*Better Question: “How does He do it through us?”*

*In a diversity of ways.*

*He Gives us Gifts!*

*Using your gift, is basically operating in your Sweet-Spot as opposed to your Sweat-Spot*

**Your SWEET SPOT, vs. Your SWEAT SPOT**

Your “Sweet spot” is the thing that you do that you really enjoy because you’re good at it, it does not require in inordinate amount of *stress-effort* and it’s effective because you are using your gift. It’s usually invigorating and inspiring and you can do it often without getting burned out easily.

Your “Sweat Spot” is the thing that you do that you don’t necessarily enjoy, but you do it because it *has* to be done. You may even have gotten good at it over time, but it’s not invigorating, it’s probably uninspiring and wearisome.

(I am not talking about mundane tasks or labor for sustenance, that’s all part of the curse. Gen 3:19 “by the sweat of your brow will you eat” that applies to shelter and household tasks as well. I don’t know anyone whose Sweet Spot is laundry or cleaning the garage)

I am talking about your spiritual gift. What is it you love to do, because you do it well, it does not require an inordinate amount of *stress-effort* and is effective?

Sadly, I’ve seen people make the mistake of being fixated on a gift they wish they had, and were driven by pride and ambition to try to achieve it on their own. It usually remains unfruitful and often ends bitterly. The worst part is that the gift that they were given was ignored and they never realize the full potential of what God wanted to bless them with.

When you do more of what is in your Sweet Spot, and less of what I in your Sweat-Spot you will be more effective, less stressed and have fulfillment, fruitfulness and joy in the journey.

When we take on the heart of a servant and humbly serve the Lord in the manner that He has gifted us, and not our own ambitions, watch what happens. We will be fulfilled in our gifts, our ministry and experience blessing in every way that God intends for us.

**Matt 23:11-12**

**“**11The greatest among you will be your servant. 12For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

My desire is that you find incredible fulfillment in using your gift to bless God and bless others here at North Shore Fellowship on a level that you have never known before.

I firmly believe that many will receive from God through you, by whatever He has gifted you with, and you will see the fruit of your labor now, and for years to come.

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