

# A Day In The Life Of The Early Church

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Acts chapter 6 Acts chapter 6 Acts chapter 6

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[ 7 : 29 ] Of the spiritual and physical needs of their community. Because we're told that as the church grew. They cared for one another. And they looked out for one another.

Because they loved one another. And the church sought to help anyone in need. The church was looking out for those in their community. In fact at the end of chapter 4.

It says there was not a needy person among them. Because everything was distributed to anyone in need. But of course as it is today.

The church isn't perfect. There were problems. And there were problems of greed in chapter 5. With Ananias and Sapphira. But as we saw last week at the concluding chapter.

In the concluding verse of chapter 5. We're told that every day in the temple. From house to house. The church did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus. As the Christ.

[ 8 : 27 ] Every day the church continued to care. For the spiritual needs of their community. By preaching the gospel. And every day the church continued to care. About the physical needs of their community.

By helping anyone in need. Every day the church was preaching the gospel. And living out the gospel. That's the way the church in the 21st century should be as well.

Preaching the gospel. And living out the gospel. But as we said. The church wasn't perfect.

Because as you know. There is no perfect church.

You know sometimes we can be guilty of looking at the church in the past. Maybe 30 years ago. Or even 150 years ago. Or even the early church itself. We can sometimes be guilty of looking at the church in the past.

With rose tinted glasses. But you know all we have to do is look at history. And it's full of failure. All we have to do is read Paul's letters. And discover all the problems that the church was dealing with.

[ 9 : 29 ] And remark. It shouldn't be surprising to us. That we're still facing the same problems today. In fact it was the evangelist Billy Graham. Who said that.

If you find the perfect church. Don't join it. You will only spoil it. And it's so true. There's no perfect church. Because the church.

Is not a museum of good people. It's a hospital for the broken. The church is not a museum of good people. It's a hospital for the broken.

As many of you know. Alison and I were in Edinburgh for a few days. We came back last night. But when we came off the train. In Waverly. Waverly station. We just walked along past.

The Edinburgh dungeon. And outside the Edinburgh dungeon. There's a huge sign. Outside it. Sinners welcome. That's what it said. The first thing I thought was.

[ 10 : 27 ] That's what should be on our door. That's what should be on the church door. Sinners welcome. Because the church. It's not a museum of good people. It's a hospital for the broken.

And the reality is. We are all broken people. Living broken lives. In a broken world. And yet the gospel. Comes to us. With healing.

And help. And that's what we see here. The challenge that the early church was facing. Here was that there was this complaint. There was a complaint. By the Hellenists.

That the Hebrews were neglecting. The Hellenist widows. In their community. And the widows. They were starving. Now the Hellenists. They were Greek speaking Jews.

They were from the. From outside Jerusalem. The Hebrews. They were native. They were native Jewish Christians. They spoke Hebrew. And they spoke. In Aramaic. And Hebrew.  
[11:21] And they lived in and around. The city of Jerusalem. But the Hellenists. They were complaining against the Hebrews. Because they felt that their widows. Were being neglected. In the daily distribution of food.

The Hellenists thought. That their widows. Were being discriminated against. Because. Well they were in the minority. They were from outside Jerusalem. And you know. As the church grew. The Hellenists. They felt that they were being. Marginalized. They felt they were being. Pushed to the one side. And their. Vulnerable widows. Were being. Neglected. Of course. I don't believe that it was intentional. Because it's quickly resolved. And rectified. But you know. Even. What we're told here. It should. Remind us.

Of what can often happen. In a congregation. Where people. They are. Unintentionally. Unintentionally. Marginalized. They're left. To the side.

[12:17] They're. They're left. To go unnoticed. Under the radar. Even forgotten. Sometimes. I feel. That maybe. With those who are housebound. Those who are unwell. And.

Or even those who come to church. Now and again. Sadly. These people. Sometimes. They just drift. And they stop coming to church. Altogether. But what do we do with them? Do we just leave them. Hoping that they'll come back. To church. By themselves. No. Do we. Gossip about them. And say. Well they were here one week. And now they're gone the next. No. Do you tell the minister. Hoping that he'll go and look. Go and look after them. And go and find them. Well tell me. But you go first.

You go and find out. What's going on. You get in touch with them. You phone them. You ask them if they're okay. You invite them to come to church. If the Lord has put them on your heart. And your mind.

[13:14] You go to them. You ask them. And you know. I'm sure that we can all think of. Of someone. Who hasn't been to church for a while. That we should really. Go and speak to.

And speaking to them. This is the thing. Speaking to them. Would not be an invasion of privacy. It will be a sign that you care. It will be a sign that you have a concern. For their soul.

And even a concern for them. And if there is someone that comes to your mind. Maybe you should make a point. Of speaking to that person. This coming week. But you know.

What we ought to learn. From the example of the early church. Is that they viewed their problems. Not as obstacles. They saw them as opportunities. They saw every problem. Not as an obstacle. But as an opportunity. Because the early church. They saw the obstacle. Of these widows starving. And they saw it as an opportunity. For serving. The early church.

[14:11] Saw the obstacle. Of widows starving. As an opportunity. For serving. The church. And that's what I want us to see secondly. So starving. And then serving.

Serving. Look at verse 2. The twelve 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. But we will devote ourselves. To prayer. And to the ministry.

Of the word. When the early church. Was faced with a problem. They didn't cover it up. Rather. They saw their problems. Not as obstacles.

But as opportunities. Opportunities. Opportunities. To serve in the church. And to serve their community. And even move forward. More with the gospel. And you know. By taking the opportunity.

[15:07] The apostles. They called. The whole church. To come together. For what was. A congregational meeting. And the apostles. They state the problem. They tell the church. What the issue.

Really is. That's facing them. And we were told that. In verse 2. The apostles say. It's not right. That we should give up. Preaching the word of God. To serve tables.

Now the apostles. They didn't say this. Because they. They were too proud. To serve tables. Or that they thought. That distributing food. To widows. Was below their pay grade. Not at all.

The apostles knew. That as elders. In the church. Their primary calling. Was prayer. And preaching the word. But their greatest fear.

Their greatest fear. Was that in focusing. Their attention. Upon serving tables. They were neglecting. What their primary calling was. The ministry of word.

[16:01] And prayer. And the end result. Would have actually been. If they had carried on. The end result. Would have been. That the church. And the community. Would have been physically starving. And spiritually starving.

Nobody would be satisfied. And that's what the early church. Didn't want. They didn't want. To neglect. Providing physical. And spiritual care. For their community. And you know. With this. The apostles. They're actually humbly. Acknowledging. And even confessing. They can't do it. On their own. That's what they're saying. They had tried.

They tried to do it. But they were trying. To do too much. With too little resources. And the outcome. Was that they had failed. They had inadvertently. And unintentionally. Neglected. Valuable people. In their community. They had neglected. The Hellenist widows. And maybe others as well. And my friend. When we try to do too much.

[16:58] With too little resources. The result. Will be. That we're either in danger. Of breakdown. Or burnout. And you know. It was D.L. Moody. The great evangelist. He once said.

It is better. To put ten men. To work. Rather than trying. To do the work. Of ten men. Seems very simple. Doesn't it. It's better to put ten men.

To work. Rather than trying to do the work. Of ten men. And that's what the apostles. Sought to do. They gathered the church together. For this congregational meeting. In order to elect. Select seven deacons. To serve. In the church. And these seven deacons. They were to be set apart. By the church. For being servants. That's what the word.

Deacon means. It means. Servant. And these seven men. They were the first deacons. In the early church. Who were carefully. And prayerfully. Elected.

[17:52] And appointed. In the early church. They're told. We're told in verse three. Pick out from among you. Seven men of good repute. Full of the spirit. And of wisdom. Whom we will appoint.

To this duty. But we will devote ourselves. To prayer. And to the ministry. Of the word. Appointing deacons. You could say. It was a wise move. On the part.

Of the apostles. Because. As they repeat. And reaffirm. In verse four. Their primary calling. As elders. In the church. Was to prayer. And to the ministry.

Of the word. And you know. As we consider. How the early church. Dealt with the issues. They faced. We're gaining. Hands-on experience. Of what the function.

Of an elder. And a deacon. Really is. And when I say elder. I include myself. In that. Because. I'm an elder. You call me the minister. But I am an elder.

[18:46] I'm a teaching elder. I've been called. And trained. To teach. Whereas. The elders. Who sit in the box. And throughout the congregation. They are ruling elders.

Who have a prayerful. And spiritual oversight. Over our congregation. And the function. Of an elder. The primary function. Of an elder. Is to pray for you.

The primary function. Of an elder. Is to pray. For you. And the people. In our congregation. And to minister. The word of God. To you.

And to those. In our congregation. Those who aren't here. Today. And you know. We're to do that. By preaching. By visiting. By fellowship. By bible studies.

By you. Evangelizing. The ministry of the word. And prayer. That's the role. Of an elder. That's the primary calling. Of an elder. To pray for you. And to minister.

[19:40] God's word. To you. Now the reason. Deacons were appointed. It's not so that elders. Can sit back. And do nothing. Not at all. Because.

As I've said before. The office of an elder. Or a deacon. It's not about. It's not about status. It's always about service. And that even. Applies to the church member.

It's not a membership. Of status. Never view it. As a membership. Of status. It's a membership. Of service. You're coming into. The voluntary army. Of Christ's church.

To serve. We're not here. As consumerists. We're here. To get our sleeves. Rolled up. And our hands dirty. That's the purpose. Of membership. In the church. Service is what's.

At the heart. Of Christianity. Serving. Is what it means. To be a follower. Of Jesus. Jesus himself. Says. I came not. To be served. But. To serve.

[20:37] And to give my life. As a ransom. For many. Therefore. The reason. The early church. The reason. They appointed elders. And deacons. And had members. Was to ensure. That what

was neglected.

Would be addressed. And what was lacking. Would be done better. And needless to say. The first century church. Have left us. The 21st century church.

They have left us. An example. An example. To follow. So that we too. Will ensure that. What is being neglected. Will be addressed. And what we might be lacking in. Will be done better.

Al Mohler. In his commentary. He's got a wonderful commentary. In the book of Acts. And he says. The apostles appointed deacons. To ensure that the congregation. Would have its physical needs. Taken care of.

While ensuring that they themselves. Would be able to continue. To give focused attention. To the ministry of the word. So that everyone. In the congregation. Might be spiritually. Nourished.

[ 21 : 36 ] And you know. That's the purpose. Of the church. And that's the purpose. Of our congregation. And that's. Even that's why we have. On the back of our intimations.

Every week. There's an intimation. For you. Which says. The pastoral. And spiritual care. Of the congregation. Is of primary importance. Therefore. If there is anyone. In the congregation. Who is ill. Or taken into hospital. Or would like a pastoral visit. Or even to be prayed for. Please. Inform the minister. Or. I should say. Inform.

One of the elders. And you know. I want to stress this to you. It's not. Just there. For show. It's there. Because. I don't want anyone. In this congregation. To be neglected.

Or marginalized. Or think. That they're unimportant. Because you're not. Unimportant. You are not unimportant. You are precious.

[ 22 : 31 ] Precious. First and foremost. In the sight of God. But precious to us. As elders. And so is your soul. You are precious. And I want to stress this to you.

Of course. As elders. And deacons. We're not perfect. Don't ever get that idea. We don't know everyone's situation. Which is why communication. Is so important.

Let us know. Never assume that. We know. Never assume that. Somebody else has told me. Or somebody else has told the elders. Or that even the elders have told me. Never assume.

Communicate with one another.

As the saying goes. There's no I in team. But the acronym of team is. Together everyone achieves more. Together everyone achieves more. And I must stress the everyone.

Because it's not. Just the elders and the deacons. Who are actively serving in the congregation. It's everyone. We're all here to work together. Everyone.

[ 23 : 29 ] Together everyone achieves more. And you know. It's just. It's something that needs to be addressed. We need to work together.

This is the important thing. And you know. The example that the early church. Is actually setting for us. They're reminding us. That everyone is to work together. For the communication. Concern.

And care. Of one another. That's what the early church. Are teaching us this morning. Everyone is to work together. In the communication. Concern. And care.

Of one another. Because that's what it means. To be serving. But the last thing we can see here.

From the example of the early church. Is speaking. Speaking. So we've looked at starving.

Serving. And speaking. Speaking. Look at verse 5. What they said. And pleased the whole gathering. And they chose Stephen. A man full of faith.

[ 24 : 24 ] And of the Holy Spirit. And Philip. And Prochorus. And Nicanor. And Timon. And Parmenas. And Nicolaus. A proselyte. Of Antioch. 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 the disciples. Multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. And a great many of the priests. Became obedient.

To the faith. When the early church. Gathered together. In order to ensure. That they would provide. Both physical. And spiritual care. For their community. They elected.

And they set apart. These seven men. Seven deacons. Seven servants. Who were full of the Holy Spirit. And of wisdom. But the thing is. We don't know much about.

These seven men. Because apart from Stephen. Whom we'll look at. In chapter 7. A bit more. But he was the first martyr. In the early church. We don't know much.

[ 25 : 19 ] Else. Apart from. About these other seven men. Apart from their names. Their names. Stephen. Philip. Prochorus. Nicanor. Timon. Permanes. And Nicolaus. Apart from their names.

We don't know much. About them. We don't know what. They did. We don't know who they. Who they were. We don't know where they were from. We don't know how they served. We don't even know what influence. They had. In the early church. And even the influence. They were in their community. But you know the thing is my friend. We don't need to know. We don't need to know.

Much about them. That's not necessary. For us to know. How these men. Serve the Lord. We don't need a historical account. Of everything these men did.

Because these deacons. They. They weren't seeking. To make a name for themselves. They didn't want to be seen. They didn't even want to be known. For what they were doing. And you know.

[ 26 : 13 ] That's the way it always should be. Because as we said. It's not about status. It's not about being seen. It's all about service. And our service.

Should be carried out. Silently. And secretly. Because as Jesus reminds us. In the Sermon on the Mount. Your heavenly father. Who sees in secret.

Shall reward you openly. So it's not about status. It's not about being seen. It's about service. And our service. Should always be carried out. Silently. And even secretly.

And you know. The reward of their service. The reward of these. These seven deacons. Was that. As they all worked together. We're told in verse seven.

The word of God. Continued to increase. And the number of disciples. Multiplied. Greatly. The church grew. The church grew. Even more.

[ 27 : 11 ] And you know. That's what it's all about. Because the church exists. For the glory of God. And the spread of the gospel. And that's the example. Of the first century church. For us. They have set for us.

This great example. That as a congregation. We exist. For the glory of God. And the spread of the gospel. That's our primary purpose.

We exist for the glory of God. And the spread of the gospel. But as we move to the conclusion. Of this chapter. And I bring this. To a conclusion.

We see yet another knockdown. We saw knockdowns. Last Lord's Day. We saw that the church. Was repeatedly knocked down. And knocked back. For presenting the truth of the gospel.

But through it all. The church learned. As we were saying last week. The church learned. That getting knocked down. In life is a given. But getting up. And moving forward. Is a choice. And that's again.

[ 28 : 08 ] What we see here. That the church did. When they were knocked down. They didn't stay down. They got back up again. And they sought to move forward. With the gospel. And that's what one of these.

Newly ordained deacons did. We're told that Stephen. Who's described in this chapter. As a man. Full of faith. He's full of faith. In the Holy Spirit. He's a man full of grace.

And power. And he was doing great wonders. And signs among the people. So needless to say. Stephen was this godly man. And he was a Christian example. In his community.

And because of that. He faced opposition from others. We're told in verse 9. Then some of those. Who belonged to the synagogue. Of the freed men. As it was called.

And of the Cyrenians. And of the Alexandrians. And of those from Cilicia. And Asia. They rose up. And disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand. The wisdom and the spirit.

[ 29 : 02 ] With which. He was speaking. Now the freed men. They were this group. Of Jewish slaves. Who had been freed. By the Romans. And they formed.

Their own synagogue. They became their own. Worshipping people. The freed men. And they had their own. Synagogue in Jerusalem. And these men were told. They tried to dispute.

With Stephen. About the gospel. But they couldn't withstand. The wisdom and the spirit. In which he was speaking. And you know my friend. What I see here.

Is that when Stephen. Was confronted and challenged. And maybe even provoked. By those. Who opposed the gospel. What we have to take home. With us. Is how he responded.

To their opposition. Because Stephen. He didn't respond. With aggression. He didn't respond. With arrogance. He didn't even respond. With antagonism.

[ 29 : 57 ] Though when Stephen. Spoke about Jesus. And the gospel. He graciously. And faithfully. But powerfully. He spoke to them. About Jesus.

And even. When they did. To Stephen. What they did. To Jesus. By making. False accusations. Against him. We're told that. In verse 10. They could not. Withstand the wisdom. And the spirit. With which he was speaking.

Then they secretly. Instigated men. Who said. We have heard him. Speak blasphemous words. Against Moses. Even when. They did. To Stephen. What they did. To Jesus.

Stephen. Do you know. He responded. In such a Christ-like manner. He did. As the apostle Peter. Says in his letter. To this.

You have been called. Because Christ. Also suffered for you. Leaving you. An example. So that you might. Follow in his steps. He committed no sin. Neither was deceit.

[ 30 : 52 ] Found in his mouth. When he was reviled. He did not revile. In return. When he suffered. He did not threaten. But continued. Entrusting himself. To him. Who judges. Justly.

And that's what Stephen did. When he suffered. He did not threaten. But continued. Entrusting himself. To Jesus. Who judges.

Justly. And we'll continue this. Further. When we come to chapter 7. And see. Stephen's speech. But what I want us. Just to leave with. This morning.

Is that Acts chapter 6. Is a day in the life. Of the early church. It's a day in the life. Of the early church. And what we learn. From the experience. Of the church.

In the first century. Is that. As a church. In the 21st century. We need to be a church. That cares for. The physical needs. Of our congregation.

[ 31 : 48 ] And also the spiritual needs. Of our congregation. We are. We are to be a church. A 21st century church. That loves one another. That cares for one another.

That bears the burdens. Of one another. That looks out. For one another. Where no one. Is to be left. On the side. Or marginalized. But everyone. Is to be made.

Special. Because they are special. In the sight of God. And their soul. Is precious. So as a 21st century church.

We need to learn. From the example. Of this. First century church. So that we too. Will grow. And continue to move forward. With the gospel.

May the Lord bless. These thoughts to us. Let us pray. Oh Lord. Our gracious God. We give thanks to thee. For. The church of Jesus Christ.

[ 32 : 45 ] That he is the king. And he is the head of it. And Lord. Help us to serve. As a body. To work together. To work as hand. And foot and arm.

To work like a body. Serving one another. Loving one another. And ultimately. Serving and loving. Our great saviour. Jesus Christ. Lord bless us.

We pray. Bless Lord. Those who may feel. Left out. That we would love them. That we would plead with them. To come to this Jesus. And find rest for their soul.

Oh Lord. Encourage us. Then we pray. Bind us together. And go before us. In all things. Keeping our eyes. Firmly. Fixed upon Jesus. The author. And the finisher.

Of our faith. Cleanse us we pray. For we ask it in Jesus name. And for his sake. Amen. We're going to bring our service.

[ 33 : 42 ] To a conclusion. This morning. By singing. In Psalm 133. Psalm 133. It's on page 424. In the Scottish Psalter.

Psalm 133. Psalm 133. Psalm 133. It's a psalm. It reminds us of the unity of God's people.

And how the church is to work together. And when the church works together. There is blessing. Behold how good a thing it is. And how becoming well.

Together such as brethren are. In unity to dwell. Like precious ointment on the head. That down the beard did flow. In Aaron's beard and to the skirt. Stood off his garments go.

As Herman's Jew. The Jew that doth. On Zion hills descend. For there the blessing God commands. Life. That shall never end. We'll sing the whole psalm.

[ 34 : 41 ] To God's place. Behold the good a thing it is.

On time becoming well. Together such as brethren.

In unity to dwell. My precious ointment on the head.

That time of the beard did flow. In it was written to the skirts.

Did all of his garments go. As her months drew.

[ 36 : 06 ] The Jew that you left. On Zion hills descend.

For there the blessing God commands.

Life that shall never end. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.  
The love of God the Father. And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Be with you all. Now and  
forevermore. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.