**Sermon Based Community Group Leader Guide**

**Acts 6:1-7**

**\* Read Acts 6:1-7. Open in Prayer.**

**\* Sermon Overview**

In this sermon, Pastor Aaron will highlight the evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit in service and will show that care for the body plays a role in spreading the gospel. As you prepare for the sermon, think on these questions: How does the Spirit lead the church to deal with conflict and how does the Spirit equip different members with different roles so that the church multiplies as the Word increases? How does the care of the body help spread the gospel?

**\* Prompt Questions**

1. Was there anything that stood out to you in the pastor’s sermon? Are there any clarifying questions that you may have regarding the sermon?

2. How have you been seeking to apply the sermon in your own life this week? Or, what is one way that you can apply the sermon to your life this week?

3. What was the take away from the sermon for you? If you had to sum up the main idea of the sermon in one sentence, what would it be? What main themes do you see in the text and did you hear in the sermon?

4. How have you seen God at work this week in your life and in the lives of those around you? How has God been working in you this week through His Word, through prayer, through the body of Christ, and through service/evangelism? What were the highlights and lowlights of your week? How can we be praying for you specifically?

**\* Observation/Interpretation Questions[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Note: Please do not feel compelled to get through every one of these questions. I have given them in hopes that they will drive us back to the text so that we may diligently search the Scriptures as the Bereans did (Acts 17:10-15). These questions will give us a grasp of what the text says/means so that we can apply the text to our lives. I would encourage you to spend the majority of your time on application questions so that we can become “doers of the Word and not hearers only” (James 1:22).

**1. What is the context of Acts 6:1-7?**

*Luke wrote Luke and Acts (written around A.D. 62) to Theophilus in order to give him an accurate account of the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and to tell how Jesus continues to work through Spirit-empowered witnesses to carry the gospel to the end of the earth without hindrance and with boldness. Acts 1:8 serves as the theme verse of the book and as the outline for the book, for chapters 1-7 focus on Jerusalem, chapters 8-12 focus on Judea and Samaria, and chapters 13-28 focus on the end of the earth. The risen Lord sends His Spirit to empower followers of the Way to be witnesses who proclaim the kingdom of God to the end of the earth.*

*As the Word increases, the church multiplies. Yet, as the church grows, opportunity for conflict arises (see the persecution, hypocrisy, and conflict in Acts 3-6). In Acts 6:1-7, we see an issue arise in the church where Hellenistic (Greek-speaking) widows are not receiving the food distribution. Once the issue is raised, the apostles devise a plan that both maintains their focus on God-given priorities—ministry of the Word and prayer—and shares the ministry with the saints (vv. 2-4), all while maintaining unity and a spirit of love within the congregation. The apostles call for the whole congregation to pick out seven men who possess a good reputation and who exhibit a life full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom. The church is pleased with this solution to the problem, and they select seven Greek-speaking men (Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicolaus) to serve tables (or to care for the needs of the body, specifically the food distribution for widows). In response, the apostles affirm the selection of these men and set them apart for service by prayer and the laying on of hands. At the resolution of this issue, Luke tells us that the Word continued to increase and that the number of disciples multiplied, including even a great many of the priests who were now obedient to the faith. In this passage, God multiplies His church through the increase of the Word, as the Spirit maintains unity, leaders display wisdom, and congregation shares in the ministry.*

**2. What is the issue in Acts 6:1?**

*Sometime after the church had endured persecution and withstood hypocrisy (Acts 3-5), another conflict arose in the church with the potential to divide the church. Luke tells us the issue is that Hellenists’ widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. He tells us who lodged the complaint (the Hellenists), the event for the complaint (Hellenists’ widows being neglected in the daily distribution), but he does not give us all the details/motivations behind why the Hellenists’ widows were being neglected. At best, the unintentional oversight could be due to the size of the church and the language difficulties within the church, and at worst, the neglect of Hellenists’ widows could be intentional oversight due to linguistic and cultural differences. Whatever the motivations behind the Hellenists’ widows being neglected, it is clear there is tension between Hellenistic Jews (Greek-speaking Jews of the Diaspora) and Hebraic Jews (Aramaic-speaking Jews of Palestine). In the rest of the story, Luke gives for us how the conflict is resolved so that the whole gathering is pleased, the Word increases, and the church multiplies.*

*Though the church in Jerusalem had conflict related to mercy ministry, note that they were involved in mercy ministry. What does mercy ministry look like at Highview generally and in our community group specifically? Remember, one of our commitments as a community group is love (meeting needs).*

*For background references on widows, see Deuteronomy 14:29; 24:17; 26:12; Ruth; Job 29:13; Psalms 68:4-6; 146:9; Isaiah 1:17, 23; 10:2; Jeremiah 7:6; 22:3; Ezekiel 22:7; Malachi 3:5; Luke 7:11-15; 12:41-42; 18:1-8; 20:47; 1 Timothy 5:3-16; James 1:27. For passages on complaining, see Philippians 2:14; 1 Peter 4:9 (If Scripture instructs us not to complain/murmur/grumble, then how are we to address issues/conflicts we may have with one another and the church?)*

*NIV Zondervan Study Bible: “(Hellenistic Jews are) Greek-speaking Jews who returned to the promised land of Israel after living in the diaspora….(Hebraic Jews are) Aramaic-speaking Jews.”*

*Tony Merida writes “Maintaining unity involved not only dealing with injustice and sin but also addressing cultural tensions.”*

*Derek Thomas writes, “The problem surfaced among the widows who lived in Jerusalem. Widows had nobody to stand up for them in ancient society. Their chance of remarriage was slim. For many, their income was minimal. There was no state or social service to help. Helping widows (and the poor generally), in an age where government social programs were nonexistent, was deemed a matter of religious responsibility. Thus, the Old Testament demanded such care (see Deuteronomy 10:12, 18-19; Matthew 25:35-40; 1 Timothy 5:3-16; James 1:27).”*

**3. What is the plan of resolution in Acts 6:2-4?**

*In response to the complaint lodged, the apostles summon together the full number of the disciples. When everyone is together, the apostles instruct the congregation to pick out seven men who are full of the Spirit and wisdom and who possess a good reputation so that these men might lead in serving tables and the apostles might lead in the ministry of the Word and prayer. The reason the apostles instructed the church to appoint seven men for the task of serving tables is because the apostles were convinced of God’s call and priority on their lives, which was to be witnesses by praying and by proclaiming the name of Jesus (see 1:8; 2:42; 4:2; 5:25, 42; 6:4).*

*Note that the apostles devote themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer because it pleases God (see Acts 20:18-21; 1 Timothy 5:17; 2 Timothy 2:15; 4:1-4). By “it is not right,” Luke is communicating that it would not be pleasing to God for the apostles to give up the preaching of the Word to serve tables.*

*As you reflect on this passage, think on these questions: What does it look like for the body of Christ to work together, using their various gifts and exercising their various roles (see 1 Corinthians 12)? How do we discern what our biblical priorities are so that we may order our lives rightly? When arriving at solutions to conflicts, work through these two key questions: Is this approach biblical? Then ask, is it wise and best?*

*For other appointment texts, see Genesis 41:29-43; Exodus 18:13-26; Numbers 11:1-25; 27:15-23; Deuteronomy 1:9-18.*

*John Stott wrote, “A vital principle illustrated in this incident, which is of urgent importance to the church today. It is that God calls all his people to ministry, that he calls different people to different ministries and that those called to ‘prayer and the ministry of the word’ must on no account allow themselves to be distracted from their priorities.” He continues, “What is needed is the basic, biblical recognition that God calls different men and women to different ministries. Then the people will ensure that their pastor is set free from unnecessary administration, in order to give himself to the ministry of the word, and the pastor will ensure that the people discover their gifts and develop ministries appropriate to them.”*

*R. Kent Hughes writes, “Delegation is at the heart of developing followers.”*

**4. What are the fruits of the plan in Acts 6:5-7?**

*Taking action on the apostles’ plan led to the following fruit: (1) the whole church was pleased with the resolution; thus, they selected seven men (who appear to all be Hellenists) from their number to carry out the task of serving tables, which enables the apostles to remain focused on the ministry of the Word and prayer; (2) with the conflict resolved, the church multiplies as the Word increases, leading even many priests to know and follow Jesus.*

*Note that Luke mentions Stephen and Philip first because they are the main characters in Acts 6-8. Also, note that Luke mentions that Nicolaus is a proselyte from Antioch, which points us forward to the church at Antioch who will be the launching place for the Gentile mission.*

*Note that the whole congregation selected the seven men whom they set before the apostles, and the apostles prayed and laid their hands on them. The laying on of hands affirmed these men and designated these seven men for the task of serving tables. Also, the laying on of hands signaled divine approval and congregational endorsement. In the Bible, we see that laying on of hands is used for the following things: (1) healing (Acts 9:17; 28:8; Luke 4:40; 13:13); (2) gift of the Spirit and reception into the church (Acts 8:17-18; 9:17; 19:6); (3) commissioning to a ministry/service (Numbers 8:10; 27:18; Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6; Hebrews 6:2).*

*Remember, in spite of suffering and persecution, sin in the church, and conflict in the church, the church continued to multiply as the word of God increased.*

*For summary/growth statements, see Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20; 28:30-31. Also, see 1 John 3:16-18.*

*NIV Zondervan Study Bible: “The seven all have Greek names, indicating that they are from the Hellenistic-Jewish community. It was important to choose Christian leadership from within that community to reflect the church’s diversity.”*

*Darrell Bock writes, “In sum, this unit (Acts 6:1-7) shows the community using its own people to solve its own problems. The community hears the complaint, owns up to the problem, allows those closest to it to solve it, delegates the authority to get it done, and then goes to work. The issue is not denied or papered over but confronted directly as a community concern.”*

*Tony Merida, “Christian wisdom flows from one’s union with Christ, the source of wisdom (Colossians 2:3). By knowing Christ and walking with him, one learns to live wisely. The selected men enjoyed this sort of dynamic relationship with Christ.”*

*Tony Merida writes, “Is this the origin of the deacon ministry? The text doesn’t call them deacons. The office of deacon isn’t even mentioned in the book of Acts, though elders are mentioned multiple times. These men, then, aren’t ordained to an office; they are commissioned, with a verb, to ‘deacon’ tables.” He continues, “Having said this, I think this passage does provide a pattern for sharing the ministry, and that’s what deacons do: they assist the pastors and elders in ministry work. How did these men go about their tasks in Acts 6? They helped and they harmonized.”*

*John Polhill writes, “The context suggests that the seven men were to be Hellenists. The system had broken down with their group, and they would know better who the needy widows were and be better able to communicate with them.”*

**\* Application Questions**

Note: Please do not feel compelled to use every question, for you will have time for 3 to 5 questions. I’ve tried to offer enough for you to pick the ones you think will best fit your group, as you know what your ladies or men are going through at this time and may need to hear. Also, please note that these questions might be adjusted to reflect what the pastor calls us to do in application of the sermon.

1. How are we to handle complaints when they arise? What is the biblical way to address complaints? If we have concerns over something going on in the church, how can we handle it and resolve it biblically? Tony Merida writes, “We must understand that failure isn’t always the result of sin. Sometimes failure is simply due to human limitations.” What do you make of this statement? When you are upset about something going on in the church, do you immediately link it to the sin of the individual? Do you go to the individual before complaining to others?

2. In Acts 6 :2-4, the apostles share the responsibility of the ministry so that they can focus on their God-given priorities—ministry of the Word and prayer. In our own lives, how can good things in life often get in the way of God-given biblical priorities? As a congregation, how can we share in the ministry with the pastors so that they can focus on the ministry of the Word and prayer (see Ephesians 4:11-16)? As a community group, how can we share in the ministry so that no one person is overburdened with leadership responsibility? What are practical ways that a community group leader can equip and empower others in the group to share in the ministry?

3. Note the characteristics of the men who are to be picked: good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom. When choosing deacons for service, do you nominate them with these qualifications in mind? When selecting/enlisting those for service in ministry, do these characteristics shape your selection/enlistment? Can you see how these characteristics flow out of the gospel, out of one who knows and follows Jesus?

4. What is it that led these men to cultivate a good reputation and to be full of the Spirit and of wisdom? What are practical ways that we can grow in godliness/Christlikeness? Do you pray for those who lead our church? If not, why not? If so, do you pray that the Lord would fill our church leadership with His Spirit and with wisdom that is exhibited in a godly lifestyle that leads to a good reputation?

5. What ministries do you know of in the church? Do you know of a ministry where there is a need for help (for example, children’s ministry or homeless ministry)? Are each of us involved in sharing the ministry of the church? Why is it important for us to join together in doing ministry (see Ephesians 4:11-16)?

6. The group in this passage who is being neglected is widows. Read 1 Timothy 5:3-16. What instructions does Paul give us in this passage for caring for widows? Are we being faithful to obey this passage? At Highview, what group of people in the church might be neglected (for example, think of single mothers, homebound members, members on your community group roll who have not been contacted recently, etc.)? What would it look like for us to join together as a community group to show love (meeting of needs; note that this is one of the commitments of a community group) to those being neglected?

7. Knowing that God continues to grow His church in spite of persecution/opposition, sin, and conflict, how should that encourage us in our pursuit of knowing and following Jesus and leading others to know and follow Jesus? What does it tell us about God that His church continues to grow in the midst of these things? Do you see conflict as an opportunity for gospel growth? How does growth of the church lead to conflict and obstacles to shepherding the body well?

8. In verse 7, Luke tells us that a great number of priests (who were hostile to the gospel) became obedient to the faith. What does this teach us about the power of the gospel? What does it teach us about the importance of the gospel being lived out by the church (see John 13:34-35; Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37; 5:12-16)? Do you have a story God saving someone you talked to this week about the gospel? Take time to pray for lost people who you have a relationship with and pray for the Spirit to give you boldness to proclaim the gospel to them this week.

9. Here are some good questions to reflect on and act on this week (these were passed along to me by Pastor Aaron and Dr. Jones):

 A. What do you take as the main theme from this sermon?

 B. What have you learned today about Jesus’ character that has affected you daily?

 C. Do you have any clarifying questions concerning the sermon?

 D. What did the Holy Spirit convict you of because of His Word today?

 E. Will you ask forgiveness and what will you change?

 F. Will you be willing this week to pass on to someone else what you’re learning about Jesus? How will you be intentional this week to do so?

10. In his book, Asking the Right Questions, Matthew Harmon gives the following instructions/questions for understanding and applying the Bible:

 A. Understanding the Bible

 1. What do we learn about God?

 a. Look for God’s character (who he is, what he is like).

 b. Look for God’s conduct (what he is doing).

 c. Look for God’s concerns (what things, events, people, he is concerned about).

 2. What do we learn about people?

 a. Look for aspects of what it means to be created in God’s image.

 b. Look for the fallen condition.

 c. Look for how God’s people should live.

 3. What do we learn about relating to God?

 a. Look for things to praise and thank God for.

 b. Look for sin to confess and repent.

 c. Look for promises and truths to believe.

 4. What do we learn about relating to others?

 a. Look for how we should interact with and treat others.

 b. Look for ways to pursue reconciliation with others.

 c. Look for specific ways to love, serve, and care for others.

 B. Applying the Bible

 1. What does God want me to think/understand?

 2. What does God want me to believe?

 3. What does God want me to desire?

 4. What does God want me to do?

**\* Sermon Take Away**

As the Word increases, the church multiplies through Spirit-empowered service, exhibited by care for the body (see John 13:34-35).

**\* Bible Reading Plan**

1. Monday—2 Corinthians 13; 2 Samuel 20

2. Tuesday—Galatians 1; 2 Samuel 21

3. Wednesday—Galatians 2; 2 Samuel 22

4. Thursday—Galatians 3; 2 Samuel 23

5. Friday—Galatians 4; 2 Samuel 24

6. Saturday—Galatians 5; 1 Kings 1

7. Sunday—Galatians 6; 1 Kings 2

**\* Unhindered: A Study of Acts (Part 1)**

1. October 22nd –Acts 6:8-8:3

2. October 29th –Acts 8:4-40

3. November 5th –Acts 9:1-31

4. November 12th –Acts 9:32-11:18

5. November 19th—Acts 11:19-30

**\* Advent 2017 (Passages are Likely to Change)**

1. November 26th—Luke 1:1-25

2. December 3rd—Luke 1:26-38

3. December 10th—Luke 1:39-56

4. December 17th—Luke 1:57-80

5. December 24th—Luke 2:1-21

**\* Unhindered: A Study of Acts (Part 2)**

1. January 7th—Acts 12 (Herod’s Persecution and Death/No government can stop God’s church)

2. January 14th—Acts 13-14

3. January 21st—Acts 15:1-35

4. January 28th—Acts 15:36-16:5

 5. February 4th—Acts 16:6-40

6. February 11th—Acts 17:1-15

7. February 18th—Acts 17:16-34

8. February 25th—Acts 18:1-23

9. March 4th—Acts 18:24-28

10. March 11th—Acts 19:1-41

11. March 18th—Acts 20:1-16

12. March 25th—Acts 20:17-30

--. April 1st (Easter Sunday)

13. April 8th—Acts 21:1-26

14. April 15th—Acts 21:27-22:29

15. April 22nd—Acts 22:30-23:35

16. April 29th—Acts 24:1-27

17.May 6th—Acts 25:1-12

18. May 13th (Mother’s Day)—Acts 25:13-26:32

19. May 20th—Acts 27:1-44

20. May 27th (Memorial Day Weekend)—Acts 28:1-31

1. For this discussion guide, I used the following resources: Darrell Bock, *Acts;* I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*; John B. Polhill, *Acts*; Derek Thomas, *Acts*; R. Kent Hughes, *Acts*; R. C. Sproul, *Acts*; John Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of* Acts; Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesu in* Acts; ESV *Study Bible*; *NIV Zondervan Study Bible.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)