Discerning Gifts for Leadership
Acts 6:1-5, 8-15
SS Lesson for 10/12/2008

Devotional Scripture: Matt 10:16-42

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**CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS**

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY**

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- A dilemma for the growing church (Acts 6:1-2)
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- Stephen and his gifts (Acts 6:8-15)
Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson
The outline and detail of the lesson came from previous SS Lessons (04/01/01 and 10/02/05). It teaches about the characteristics and power of a Servant Leader. The study's aim is to show that individuals willing to do humble service for Christ might also aspire to other forms of service. The study's application is to learn and seek to do humble service in whatever God requires of us in His Church.

Lesson Introduction and Background
From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary
What sort of organizational structure should a church have? Who should its leaders be? How should the structure and the leaders be put in place? These are ongoing questions for any church. It is natural that a church will reflect some of the leadership and organizational traditions of her culture. There are, however, biblical principles that must serve the church in any era. The book of Acts is rightly seen as something of a template for “how to do church.” This is because the first-century church was largely formed by the efforts of the apostles. They were authorized by Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit to establish the church. We must presume that the apostles understood Jesus’ intentions and that their decisions to meet the challenges that confronted the first-century church are still valid ways of understanding “how to do church” today. Today’s lesson involves the trials that arose in a growing church. Church growth brings both blessing and difficulty. What do you do when you outgrow your assembly space? How do you assimilate new believers from diverse backgrounds into the body of Christ? What happens when your church outgrows her leadership structure? Perhaps a church of 20 can make consensus decisions after a potluck dinner on Sunday afternoon, but does this work for a church of 500 or 5,000? Acts does not give definitive answers to these specific questions. But the principles we find in Acts 6 still are required reading for guiding the church in its selection of leaders.

In the fourth century B.C., Alexander the Great led his Greek armies to conquer much of the ancient world. This was more than a military conquest. Alexander and his people saw themselves as missionaries for the Greek way of life. They considered Greek culture superior to other cultures. This included the Greek language, Greek philosophy, and Greek lifestyle (including athletic training). This Greek culture is referred to as Hellenism. At the time of Acts, Hellenism had gained adherents throughout the Roman Empire. Consider that Paul wrote his letter to the Romans in Greek, even though he was writing to the center of the Latin, Roman world. Paul knew that everyone in that church would understand Greek because Hellenism had a deep influence on the imperial city. Hellenism had made inroads into Judaism, even in Palestine and Jerusalem. We see this among the 12 disciples of Jesus, 2 of whom have Greek names (Andrew and Philip; see John 12:20–22). Adoption of Hellenism was probably more prevalent among Jews of the Diaspora, meaning those living outside Palestine (see James 1:1). Greek ways were fiercely resisted by traditionalist Jews, who saw Hellenism as a threat. An obvious differentiation between a Hellenistic and a traditional Jew was in the language spoken. Hellenistic Jews spoke Greek and used the Greek translation of Scripture we know as the Septuagint. Traditional Jews in Jerusalem spoke Hebrew or Aramaic, related languages that were the original languages of the Old Testament. Some Jews like Paul were able to bridge the gap, being fluent in both Greek and Hebrew (see Acts 21:37–22:2). The reality of the existence of Hellenistic and traditionalist Jews forms the backdrop for the story of Acts 6. Since the church had not spread beyond Jerusalem and all its members were Jewish Christians, it is not surprising that this historic rivalry caused friction. Today’s church still faces culturally based conflict between members. Thus the steps taken by Peter and the other leaders to resolve this problem are instructive for us.

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator
Churches frequently experience problems. There is a simple reason for this: Churches are made up of people! Although we are redeemed, we do not always live up to our calling. Pride and selfishness are often
seen among the most dedicated believers. Of course, problems sometimes arise because of injustices or the wrong actions of others. While experiencing problems in a local church may not be the most pleasant task leaders and members face, it is somewhat inevitable. Finding ways to solve problems and learn from them should be our goal. Practically speaking, promoting harmony among God's people is to everyone's benefit. However, there is another important reason for dealing with conflict in the church: our witness in the world. When churches bicker and split, it diminishes our effectiveness. Any organization that grows rapidly eventually has to catch up with itself in providing leadership. Theologians like to think of the church not as an organization but as an organism, having Christ as its Head and believers as members of His body (Eph. 4:7-16). Even in the early church, however, the need for selected and appointed individuals to meet material needs was realized. Among the seven men chosen for this work were two (Stephen and Philip) who also had preaching gifts. One became the first martyr for Christ (Acts 7:54-60), and the other evangelized a city of Samaria (8:5-8).

**Major Theme Analysis**

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

**Characteristics of a Servant Leader (Acts 6:1-5)**

1 Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a murmuring against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.
2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.
3 "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business;
4 "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."
5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch,

**Has a commitment to God's Word (vs 2)**

_A commitment to mature through constant use of God's word (Heb 5:11-14)_

11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

_A commitment to correctly interpret and apply God's word (2 Tim 2:15)_

15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

_A commitment to meditate and study God's word (Deut 6:6-9)_

6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

_A commitment to search God's word to validate what has been heard (Acts 17:11)_

11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.
A commitment to faithfully study word to be equipped for good work (2 Tim 3:14-17)

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

A commitment to allow the Holy Spirit to teach the meaning of God's word (Luke 24:45)

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

A commitment to heed the warning of God's word (1 Cor 10:9-11)

9 We should not test the Lord, as some of them did-and were killed by snakes. 10 And do not grumble, as some of them did-and were killed by the destroying angel. 11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.

Selects and follows godly leadership (vs 3)

Select leadership that doesn't lead into sin (Mark 9:42)

42 "And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.

Commentary from the Life Application Notes
This caution against harming little ones in the faith applies both to what we do individually as teachers and examples and to what we allow to fester in our Christian fellowship. Our thoughts and actions must be motivated by love (1 Cor. 13), and we must be careful about judging others (Matthew 7:1-5; Romans 14:1-15:4). However, we also have a responsibility to confront flagrant sin within the church (1 Cor. 5:12-13).

Select leadership that is accountable (James 3:1)

1 Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Commentary from the Life Application Notes
Teaching was a highly valued and respected profession in Jewish culture, and many Jews who embraced Christianity wanted to become teachers. James warned that although it is good to aspire to teach, the teachers' responsibility is great because their words and example affect others' spiritual lives. If you are in a teaching or leadership role, how are you affecting those you lead?

Follow leadership that follows and teaches the truths of the faith (1 Tim 4:6-8)

6 If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. 7 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. 8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

Follow leadership that teaches about the kingdom of God (Matt 13:52)

52 He said to them, "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."
Follow leadership that is faithful to the trust given them (1 Cor 4:1-2)
1 So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. 2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

Follow leadership that are ministers of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:6)
6 He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant-- not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Select leaders that are above reproach (1 Tim 3:2-7)
2 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. 5 (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. 7 He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

Follow leaders that are selected by the Holy Spirit as overseers and shepherds (Acts 20:28)
28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Follow leaders that are willing and eager to serve (1 Pet 5:2-3)
2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

Follow and submit to leaders so that their work is a joy (Heb 13:17)
17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Has a devotion to prayer and ministry (vs 4)

Devotion to prayer to keep from anxiousness (Philip. 4:6)
6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Devotion to prayer because it can be powerful and effective (James 5:16)
16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Devotion to prayer because it pleases God (Proverbs 15:8)
8 The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him.

Devotion to prayer to aid in finding God's desires (Jeremiah 29:13)
13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Devotion to prayer because it is God's will (1 Thes. 5:16-18)
16 Be joyful always; 17 pray continually; 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
Commentary from Life Application Notes

Our joy, prayers, and thankfulness should not fluctuate with our circumstances or feelings. Obeying these three commands—be joyful, pray continually, and give thanks—often goes against our natural inclinations. When we make a conscious decision to do what God says, however, we will begin to see people in a new perspective. When we do God's will, we will find it easier to be joyful and thankful. We cannot spend all our time on our knees, but it is possible to have a prayerful attitude at all times. This attitude is built upon acknowledging our dependence on God, realizing his presence within us, and determining to obey him fully. Then we will find it natural to pray frequent, spontaneous, short prayers. A prayerful attitude is not a substitute for regular times of prayer but should be an outgrowth of those times. Paul was not teaching that we should thank God for everything that happens to us, but in everything. Evil does not come from God, so we should not thank him for it. But when evil strikes, we can still be thankful for God's presence and for the good that he will accomplish through the distress.

Devotion to prayer because it is commanded by Jesus (Luke 18:1)

1 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

Devotion to ministry because it will reap a reward (Gal 6:9)

9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Devotion to ministry because it is never in vain (1 Cor 15:58)

58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Devotion to ministry because it leads to eternal life (Rom 2:7)

7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

Devotion to ministry is profitable both for the giver and the receiver (Titus 3:8)

8 This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Devotion to ministry results in praise and thanksgiving to God (2 Cor. 9:12-13)

12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. 13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

Power of a Servant Leader (Acts 6:8-15)

8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. 9 Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. 11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council.
13 They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law;
14 for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us."
15 And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

A ministry with power (vs 8)

_Go to Gal 2:8_
8 For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles.

_Go to 2 Cor 3:7-11_
7 Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, 8 will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? 9 If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! 10 For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. 11 And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!

_Go to 1 Cor 2:4-5_
4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

_Go to 1 Cor 4:20_
20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.

_Go to 2 Cor 10:3-6_
3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 6 And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete.

_Go to Eph 3:16_
16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

_Go to 1 Thess 1:5_
5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake.

_Go to 2 Tim 1:8_
8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God,
A ministry that can't be resisted (vs 9-10)

Can't be resisted because it is God who empowers the ministry (Ex 4:11-12)
11 The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? 12 Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

Can't be resisted because it is of the Holy Spirit (Matt 10:19-20)
19 But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, 20 for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Can't be resisted because God gives the words and wisdom (Luke 21:15)
15 For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

Can't be resisted because it is like fighting with God (Acts 5:38-39)
38 Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. 39 But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

Can't be resisted because it is based on God's power (1 Cor 2:4-5)
4 My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, 5 so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

A ministry that will be opposed (vs 11-14)

Opposed by people who have been captivated by Satan (2 Tim 2:24-26)
24 And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Expect frustrations and opposition and therefore test all things by the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:1-3)
4:1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

Opposition sometimes seem overwhelming, but the answer is to consult and rely on God (Joshua 9:1-2)
1 Now when all the kings west of the Jordan heard about these things--those in the hill country, in the western foothills, and along the entire coast of the Great Sea as far as Lebanon (the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites)-- 2 they came together to make war against Joshua and Israel.

Life Application Notes
To guard against opposition pressures, we must rely on God and communicate daily with him. He will give us strength to endure the direct pressures and wisdom to see through the trickery.
When we forget who is on our side or see only our own resources, we tend to panic at the sight of the opposition (1 Samuel 13:6)

6 When the men of Israel saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns.

Believers can expect opposition when they do God’s work (2 Tim. 3:12)

12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

Life Application Notes

Unbelievers and evil spiritual forces are always working against God and his people. The opposition may offer compromising alliances (Ezra 4:2), attempt to discourage and intimidate us (Ezra 4:4-5), or accuse us unjustly (Ezra 4:6). If you expect these tactics, you won’t be halted by them. Move ahead with the work God has planned for you, and trust him to show you how to overcome the obstacles.

Always be prepared to face opposition (Luke 10:3)

3 Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.

Some oppose because they love unrighteousness (John 3:19-21)

19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

A ministry that can’t be denied (vs 15)

Can’t be denied because of God’s wisdom (Eccl 8:1)

1 Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things? Wisdom brightens a man's face and changes its hard appearance.

Can’t be denied because of reflecting God’s glory (2 Cor 3:18)

18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Can’t be denied because faith in God (1 Tim 3:13)

13 Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

Can’t be denied because if God is for us who can be against us (Rom 8:31)

31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Can’t be denied because God is able to make His witnesses stand firm (Rom 14:4)

4 Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Acts 6 does not serve as a precise blueprint as to how churches should put leadership into place, for it does not include many details that we would find useful. By observing the process, however, we can see at least
three principles that churches today can follow in leadership decisions. First, the leaders of the first-century church were servants. The seven were chosen to serve as food stewards. The apostles chose to relinquish this task and focus on their calling of serving the Word of God. This concept of leading by serving is part of the Christian worldview. Most societies experience a leader as someone who expects to be served. In the church, leaders are to put self-interests aside and seek to minister to the needs of the members and the community. Second, moral qualities (some prefer the stronger word qualifications) of leaders are important. The personal list used in Acts 6 includes having a good reputation, spiritual maturity, demonstrated ability to make wise decisions, and availability for service (that is, commitment). Other places in the New Testament give additional qualities (1 Timothy 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–8). The newspaper in my city recently ran a story about an elder at a prominent church who was arrested for sexual abuse of foster children and possession of child pornography. What a horrible witness for the church! Moral qualities are important. Third, the selection of the seven in Acts 6 involved input from the congregation and approval by the existing leaders. A healthy church will have a balance of these two. New leaders should not be chosen merely by a powerful minister or elder. This leads to favoritism and power bases. On the other hand, simply letting the general congregation choose leaders can lead to popularity contests. Acts 6 does not explain fully the way the Jerusalem church accomplished this balance, and each congregation should decide its own process. But input from both “above” and “below” will result in leaders who have the full confidence of all.

**Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

God is in the business of providing solutions to our problems. The main way He does so is by using people. Last week we saw an interesting example of some disciples who preached powerfully when they were filled with the Holy Spirit. This week we will see what else God will do with that filling. Acts 6 shows the way God led the early church to deal with the problems that arose when Greek-speaking Jewish widows were not cared for as well as those who spoke the local language. Since the church was not limited to longtime residents of Palestine, problems came from relationships with Jewish believers who were influenced by other cultures. When the Jerusalem church chose the first deacons to deal with this problem, the apostles told the church members to choose men based on three critical considerations. First, these men were to be of "honest report." They were to have a good standing in the community. That is very important, especially today. It is truly sad that there have been so many church scandals. If churches would make it a priority to select leaders in good standing in the community, that would prevent many scandals. This should be done. It is something God requires (cf. I Tim. 3:1-13). Second, these deacons were to be "full of the Holy Ghost." Paul dealt with this matter in his epistle to the Ephesians: "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (5:18). This is not something just for leaders: it is for all Christians. Nevertheless, it is a special consideration for the leadership of the local church. God expects it. Finally, these deacons were to be "full of . . . wisdom." Wisdom is so important that much of the book of Proverbs is devoted to it. Solomon began by stating the purpose of the book: "to know wisdom" (1:2). The way to get that wisdom is by fearing God (9:10). Wisdom has been defined as applied knowledge. That is a good working definition. It means a person must have knowledge to begin with. That knowledge comes through studying the Word of God. That is one of the most important reasons to read God's Word every day. Bible reading gives us the knowledge we need, and the Holy Spirit applies that knowledge so that we can exercise wisdom. Another statement in the text is that once the church had selected the seven men for the job of serving food to the widows, the apostles would appoint them to their positions. This shows the necessity of having proper authority. There are no more apostles today, so where does that leave us? First, we need to realize that this matter of selecting deacons was sanctioned by the apostles, who were God's choice for the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20; cf. Rev. 21:14). Second, the whole basis of leadership in the church is rooted in God's organization, which we see in Scripture. The early church is often looked to as a model of perfection, but they were not perfect. There were problems, but God worked through the troubles not just to fix the problems but also to show us how He wants His church to be run.

**Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

1. We must not allow practical problems to distract us from spiritual priorities (Acts 6:1-2)
2. In the church, even simple service requires spiritual commitment (vs. 3)
3. The answer to church problems is spiritual people (vs. 4-5)
4. Faithfulness in little things often leads to greater opportunities to serve (vs. 8-10)
5. Faithful service inevitably brings opposition (vs. 11-14)
6. Even if our message is rejected, our godly character will be a testimony to God's grace (vs. 15)

Heart of the Lesson from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

A dilemma for the growing church (Acts 6:1-2)

The growing church in Jerusalem faced both a logistical problem and the apparent intrusion of secular prejudices. The number of people was growing, including the number of widows, but the number of designated people to help the widows was not keeping up with their increasing number. One group within the church was the Hellenistic, or Greek-speaking, Jews, those who came from outside Israel and who did not speak Aramaic. This situation was a reflection of the Jewish world, in which there were conflicts between the Aramaic-speaking and the Greek-speaking Jews. The complaint arose that the Greek-speaking widows were being overlooked in favor of the Aramaic-speaking widows. The twelve disciples recognized their own true responsibilities. They were responsible for studying, teaching, and preaching the Scriptures. To do otherwise would erode the vital role of the Bible in the early church.

The solution (Acts 6:3-5)

The disciples informed the church about their priorities and advised that seven godly men be selected. Their responsibility would be to carry out the physical duties of caring for the widows. These men were to have exemplary character, and they were to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Although the ministry for which the men were chosen was primarily that of meeting physical needs, they nevertheless needed spiritual qualifications. The church was given the responsibility of recognizing these men with special gifts and calling them out for special service. The apostles then prayed and laid hands upon them. Of the seven men chosen, Luke focused on Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit.

Stephen and his gifts (Acts 6:8-15)

Luke wrote that Stephen, empowered spiritually, did great miracles. His ministry blossomed beyond merely serving the widows. Allowed to use his gifts freely, he became a powerful apologist for the faith. His gifts were tested so successfully against the Synagogue of the Freedmen that they could not dispute him. Stephen's opponents, unable to dispute his powerful testimony, changed tactics. They resorted to false accusations. His testings and opportunities for testimony increased as he was brought before the Sanhedrin. Even though his accusers lied about him, the Lord used the occasion to allow Stephen to give his greatest speech, a dynamic message that earned a key place in Scripture. Stephen was chosen to free the twelve disciples from earthly obligations and enable them to concentrate on the Scriptures. Ironically, his life as a servant led to his becoming a prominent part of Scripture itself. Stephen's story is a powerful example for the church as a whole and for individual believers. The church's requirement for ministry tasks was spiritual maturity. Once individuals are recognized for their spiritual maturity, they often have the confidence to grow and serve in greater capacities. From Stephen's perspective, his opportunity opened for service because he had already demonstrated spiritual maturity. He was not satisfied, however, to serve only in his assigned task. He used the opportunity to grow and become a powerful witness and martyr.