

Acts 2020 #11 20051
Acts 6:1-7
Navigating Gospel Life

- I. It is interesting that as life expands and God draws us into fruitfulness, so also stress can deepen and force us to re-evaluate what we are doing. **Jesus did this in Mark 1:35-39.**
 - A. Capernaum ministry was really busy and productive. Crazy busy.
 - B. But Jesus still sought the Father's clarification in prayer.
 - C. The result was a recalibrating of his activities and refocusing on preaching the kingdom.
- II. **A similar situation faced the Apostles in the growing church. Acts 6:1-7.**
 - A. **3 reasons for this account: (moving toward the world mission)**
 1. To show that the gospel was spreading rapidly in Jerusalem. 7
 - a) In spite of opposition (ch.5)
 2. To introduce Stephen and Philip, who will play key roles in the mission as Apostolic Delegates.
 - a) Both Stephen and Philip do apostolic signs, extending the gospel ministry under the apostolic authority.
 - (1) But their initial work was that of helping on a practical level.
 - b) Stephen preaches pointedly to Jewish leaders and becomes the first martyr. Ch.7
 - (1) Luke also introduces Saul of Tarsus through this.
 - c) Philip preaches counterintuitively to the Samaritans and becomes the first cross-cultural missionary. Ch.8.
 - (1) Not as a result of "strategy" but providence. The stress in Jerusalem persecution spread the believers out.
 3. To reveal the need to re-calibrate and focus on the gospel.
 - a) The Apostles clarify and act on their own calling.
 - B. **3 issues that cropped up. v. 1-2**
 1. **Material need:** Some needy people were being overlooked. 1
 - a) Daily distribution of food. Physical needs are important
 - (1) The daily serving = the aid rendered to widows and orphans, shut-ins and those who couldn't work
 - b) *Administration is crucial so that as much as possible we care for one another compassionately.*
 2. **Potential Division:** A cultural difference and administrative oversight.
 - a) Complaint = gogguzmos = grumbling, grievance, division
 - b) Hellenistic: Greek speaking Jews who followed the Greek cultural norms
 - c) Hebrews: Aramaic speaking Jews who were stricter in their understanding of the traditions. And felt threatened by Greek lifestyles.
 - d) *There was a lot of snobbery/ bigotry between the Hebrew and Greek groups*
 - e) *People don't get over ethnic prejudice simply by conversion to Christ, Jesus has to re-teach them.*
 3. **Spiritual Distraction:** The apostles were being distracted from the main calling. 2
 - a) Note that the proclamation and teaching ministry, supported by serious prayer, needed to be prioritized.
 - C. **The Apostles did three important things.**
 1. **They validated the need.**
 - a) **The widows did need help and the oversight needed fixed.**
 - b) *Practical help is an important aspect of gospel service.*
 - c) They sought to solve it rather than get into the argument.
 - d) In fact, it was so important that they bestowed real authority on the Seven, to multiply the witness to Christ in this situation.

2. **They re-established their own priorities.**
 - a) *But the practical help is secondary to the main callings.*
 - b) Two main priorities for the apostles and the church.
 - (1) Prayer. Intercession for the progress of the gospel.
 - (a) Asking God to bless and empower the gospel (4:29) and feed and nourish the sheep.
 - (2) Ministry of the Word
 - (a) Ministry = service, diakonia. Providing something
 - (b) Word = the gospel and its entailments as it is revealed throughout Scripture.
 - (3) *Praying for and Communicating God's message about Jesus, making disciples, nourishing and equipping them. (Jn.21:15ff)*
 - c) *Saying NO is a vital ability, for a church and for a person.*
3. **They expanded the ministry through others.** 1 Cor.12:4-7
 - a) *Trusting God to meet real needs through other people.*

III. 4 pieces of advice for anyone navigating gospel life (like the 1st century)

- A. Watch for the stress fractures. Tiny cracks that happen from over-use.
 1. *The Lord may well be using this stress to re-set your priorities.*
 2. Many people are strung-out and don't realize it.
 3. Symptoms of spiritual stress fractures:
 - a) Anger. at other Christians for "not doing enough."
 - b) Despair. Loss of joy regarding your forgiveness and the power of the gospel itself in you and through you.
 - c) Distraction. Inability to remain centered on the Lord's will in the world.
 - (1) Falling into sinful coping mechanisms.
- B. Resist the "Tyranny of the Urgent."
 1. Re-prioritize the Lord.
 2. If we do not regularly re-commit to the biggest realities, other things will crowd them out.
 3. *What in your life cannot be delegated?*
- C. Trim the Tree.
 1. Suckers are a tree's attempt to grow more branches, often in response to some kind of injury.
 2. Remove the good things that distract from the best.
 3. Jesus did this. He said no to good requests. Mark 1; Lk. 12:13-14
 - a) *This means not necessarily adopting other people's view of what you should be doing, but going to the Lord for your personal priorities.*
- D. Above all—Obey the Faith. What does it mean to be "obedient to the faith?"
 1. The gospel is not simply a ticket to heaven. It is a way of life. **Gal.2:14**
 - a) **Rom.1:5.** We are apostles...to bring about the *obedience of faith*.
 2. Obedience of faith means:
 - a) Repenting and trusting Jesus Christ instead of our religion, personal righteousness, politics.
 - (1) The priests had to stop trusting Judaism, Israel, Rome and deeply trust Jesus as the Messiah.
 - b) Continuing to let the Spirit transform us. **Rom.12:1-2**
 - (1) Not conformed to the world, but transformed by the Spirit.
 - (2) Transforming our priorities, goals, character, mission in life.

IV. Sink your roots down in the good news of the gracious lordship of Jesus the Messiah.