

One of the biggest misconceptions in the Church today is that only a few are called to serve. The fact of the matter is that WE ARE ALL CALLED INTO FULL-TIME CHRISTIAN SERVICE. You may work for the butcher, the baker, or the candlestick maker, but if you are a Christian, God has a divine purpose for you to fulfill wherever you might be. When you change jobs or possibly retire from your job, you are just being moved to a new assignment. Pastor Larry calls that being moved into a new field of harvest. Don't confuse that with thinking that you may be the person that needs to be doing the harvesting. Very few of us are called to drive the combine. We are all called to encourage, plow ground, plant seeds, weed rows, or tend the garden called the Kingdom of God. We should all be busy doing as the old hymn says:

Sowing in the morning, sowing seeds of kindness,
Sowing in the noontide and the dewy eve;
Waiting for the harvest, and the time of reaping,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.

Our own Pastor Larry told me that he thought he was moving from Katy to Grimes County just to live out a comfortable life and to eventually just die. God never moves His children from something to nothing. There is no retirement in the Bible. I think the Lord intends for you and me to wear out, not to rust out. When I came to the Grove seven years ago next week, the Lord very keenly and decisively put into my heart that we have been brought together in this place to play out the fourth quarter in a proactive purposeful way. What do I mean by the fourth quarter?

Many coaches, when they are in the fourth quarter with a substantial lead, will begin to play the game too conservatively. And when they do, the most likely outcome is that they lose the lead to the other side that is playing for their lives. As the committee that called me to the Grove gathered, I challenged them that day saying, "Most of us in this room are in the 4th Quarter, let's make it count!" To make it count, we all must be engaged in the calling to which each of us is called. This morning we are looking at how the early Church responded to certain problems by calling others to operate in their area of gifting to bring about God's purposes for His Church. Turn with me to Acts chapter 6.

V. 1 Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. (Acts 6:1, NKJV).

When churches grow, problems are inevitable. There might be personality conflicts. There are definitely challenges with the facility. In the earliest days of our ministry here

together at the Grove, the baptismal pool leaked, the kitchen sink wouldn't drain, many of the toilets wouldn't flush, and we had no projector or adequate sound system to conduct our worship services. We had big holes in the walls and squirrels would get into the sanctuary. The air conditioners in the Fellowship Hall didn't work. But as the old pledge from vacation Bible school states: "We pledged to do the best we could for Jesus' sake today!" And we did it. We did the best we could together to have a service. We prayed for help, and little by little God sent more people through the door that could help with the kitchen, the bus, the plumbing, the wiring, and all the other challenges that we faced. When folks showed up to help in the church, we felt like God was sending in the cavalry or the Marines.

In the passage we've just read, the Church was in its infancy. The pastors were trying to meld together Jews from two differing backgrounds. Some had been raised as Hebrews (very Jewish in their culture), and others were raised in Hellenized or "Greek" type backgrounds. As these Jews of different backgrounds came together, conflict was inevitable. That's what we call "growing pains." But the grace and mercy of Jesus was what brought these cultures together, and it was the grace and mercy of Jesus that would continue to hold these two groups together. Deacons were part of the first glue that God provided to keep everything running smoothly in His Church.

There were some very poor widows who would have starved to death, but they were given a certain daily portion so that they wouldn't. This problem arose at a time when the church was increasing in numbers. We've seen some of the stresses of growth here at the Grove. You show up and suddenly someone's parking in the place you used to park, or someone is sitting in the pew that is "your" pew. It's easy for people to fall through the cracks. That's why we called another affiliate pastor last week. We don't want anyone falling through the cracks. We have actually had some people go to other churches because the Grove has now grown "too big" in their minds. What happens is that intimacy is lost, and people no longer know everyone in the room. (I will add that usually those who don't know everyone in the room don't spend much time at the church or with the people in the church. I'm not criticizing them. That is just the reality. The more you're involved, the more people you'll know.)

Vv. 2-5 *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 [a gentile] from Antioch, (Acts 6:2-5, NKJV).*

They got everyone together and they decided that the best way to handle this was to pick some men who would oversee the ministry. They gave some specific qualifications. The disciples instructed the congregation to pick out seven men with the following qualifications:

- 1 **Good Reputation** – They were overseeing a ministry that had already had some problems. It needed to be run by men who were known for their fairness and good reputation. Men were needed who knew how to run their own homes and therefore, could run the business of the church. They had good reputations out in the community and among the people that were in the Church. Leadership in the Church is not done by popularity contest or necessarily by those who have been successful in business. That “good reputation” must be part of it.

Picking men who don’t have a “good reputation” can have devastating downstream results. I have a good friend who is quite hostile to the gospel and to the Church. She told me that as a child she attended a church in a small country town. She was poor and grew up without a daddy in her household. As she grew up, she blossomed into a beautiful young woman. She told me that the pastor and a few of the deacons began to flirt with her and made sexual advances towards her. She told me she has no reason to ever go back into a church, as churches are all full of hypocrites. A solid good reputation is essential for those in Church leadership.

- 2 **Full of the Holy Spirit** – They were going to choose men that had the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their lives. That’s what we should look for in the lives of people who are in leadership. For a person to serve the people of God they need to show that they have hearts full of love and joy. They need to exhibit that they have a spirit of peace in their lives. It is essential that they be patient people who can put up with “rascals” in a gentle way. They need to not just appear to be “good,” but they need to be a “good” filled with the goodness of the Lord. They need to be people that have rock-solid faith. And they need to be meek, not trying to have everything go their own way even if they’re able to be a bully and get their way. They should be able to control themselves. That is pretty much a description of a person whose life is controlled by the Holy Spirit.
- 3 **Men Full of Wisdom** – These are men who have a track record of making wise decisions. The problem being resolved here was that some women had been overlooked, and that problem needed to be solved. Men that are full of wisdom not only have the knowledge, but they have the wisdom to know how to apply that knowledge to the problem. Knowledge is realizing and knowing there is a problem, and wisdom is having the ability to rely on the Holy Spirit to solve the problem.

These seven that were picked ALL had Greek names. This is important because the complaint had been brought by the Hellenists (by those in the "Greek" camp). All seven of these men chosen were from Hellenistic backgrounds and were called on to take care of the complaint.

The pastors realized that it would not be right for them to put aside prayer and the ministry of the Word to do administrative tasks. They weren't saying that the work needing to be done was beneath them. They were saying that "WE NEED TO DO WHAT WE ARE CALLED TO DO." Each of us needs to do what we are called to do. In the early days here at the Grove, I was tempted to try to take care of any problem that arose. But I knew that if the Grove were to ever be any larger than Sandy and me, we had to find people that were gifted in various areas and delegate to those people. I would say one of the hardest areas for me to give up was leading the singing. I've always been a strong singer, and I knew that I could do what needed to be done if we were in a pinch. (Do you notice how many times I've said "I" in that sentence?) For now, God has taken away my singing voice and now I HAVE to give that part up as well to others whom He has called to take care of that need.

It is important that each of us perform in the areas in which we are gifted and TO WHICH WE HAVE BEEN CALLED BY GOD. This is a warning to every pastor who feels that he must have his finger in everything that goes on in the church. If I do that, I am getting in the way of what God wants to do in this church. If I try to do everything, it means I don't trust God to do what needs to be done. That is born out of pride and insecurity. It is born out of not believing that God is not able to perform what needs to be done. The Church is a body of many members and scripture tells us this over and over.

*¹⁴ For in fact the body is not one member but many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? ¹⁸ But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the **body just as He pleased**. [God's calling] ¹⁹ And if they were all one member, where would the body be? (1 Corinthians 12:14-19, NKJV).*

EVERYONE IN THIS ROOM IS CALLED INTO FULL-TIME MINISTRY. Wherever you're working, you are in a field of harvest. Whatever you do, DO IT TO THE GLORY OF GOD (1 Corinthians 10:31). I was once in a church that had a bunch of different positions, and they just tried to find a person for the position regardless of the person's calling. That was not a good thing. It denied the calling that God has on each of our lives. You end up with a person who is supposed to be in the kitchen, but he's running the church, or a person that's supposed to be teaching, but he's cleaning the kitchen. One reason we

wrote the by-laws the way we did concerning deacons is that we didn't want a person placed into a leadership position by popular vote. We have a process by which the pastors and deacons have a chance to work shoulder-to-shoulder with those who are called into leadership.

And it's all sort of strange because although a church operates with certain business principles in mind, they don't always work for a church. That's because a church is the Body of Christ and not just another business. It is a ministry guided by the Holy Spirit of God to accomplish what HE wants to accomplish in this community. Verse six discusses how those who were called to the distribution ministry were blessed before they went out to do what they were supposed to do.

*⁶ whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, **they laid hands on them.** ⁷ Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:6-7, NKJV).*

It was important enough to lay their hands on these men and to show in a visible way that these men had been given the privilege and the responsibility to carry out the work that was needed. And what was the result? The text tells us that the church was growing, and people were getting saved. We then see that some of the "priests" (those are Jewish priests) were being saved.

When my kids were little, I used to tell them that it is amazing what we can get done as a family when we're not concerned with who gets the credit. A church works the same way. It is amazing what God can do through us as a church when we don't each try to get the glory or credit for the great things that God does in and through us. It is His work. To God be the glory!

Later, Paul wrote Timothy outlining more specifically what a deacon (a dedicated church servant) was to look like.

⁸ Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, ⁹ holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. ¹⁰ But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. ¹¹ Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. ¹³ For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 3:8-13, NKJV).

An elder/pastor oversees the church with more of a spiritual outlook. The Bible never sets up deacons as a governing board. They are not the board of directors in a church. They are in a leadership position, but they are out in the community of faith DOING

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE. They are not called to rule. They are called TO DO. I like to call them SUPER-SERVANTS. They are servant leaders that come alongside the ministry and do what needs to be done. They see a need and they fill it.

You know, God has a task for each and every one of us in this church. If you're looking at what goes on in this church, and you see a gap that exists that needs to be filled, it very well may be that God is calling you to meet that need. Our church is primarily a volunteer church, and I think this is one of the things that makes it so healthy. No task here is more important than the other. We need to do all things to the glory of God. I will end by quoting the Apostle Paul: *"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3:23-24, NKJV).* I know that we grow weary in our tasks, but Paul addresses that as well, *"⁹ And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart."* (Galatians 6:9, NKJV).

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.
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