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theme: Distractions? (Acts 6:1-7)

materials: Bibles, news story, paper, pens

welcome



Write a job description for the perfect pastor / cell leader.

Bring in a news item about your neighbourhood, city, country or world that you can discuss with the cell. Where do you see God in this story? Ask other members of cell to bring in stories to discuss in subsequent weeks.

worship



Where have you seen God this week? Where have you experienced divine community this week? Pray for unity in the cell, and in the Church. Pray, in particular, against evils that divide, such as racism, or other distinctions such as class, gender, background, etc...Pray that no one would be overlooked or excluded from our community because of these things.

If you are in Vancouver, join 614 on Thursday night at 6:30pm for our Knee Drill prayer and worship time.

word



Have one person read **Acts 6:1-7** out loud. While they read, have one other person write down, word for word, what the person reads. Have everyone else in cell talking loudly, singing, snapping fingers, etc...being as distracting as possible. At the end, see what the person has written down, and gauge how close it is by reading out the passage again, this time without the distractions.

What kinds of things distract you from God?

What was threatening to distract the apostles from their job?

What was the apostles' job? Are there people today who still have this role?

Was it wrong for them to be organising the food distribution? Why or why not?

Is teaching and preaching more important than food distribution? Why or why not?

Why were certain widows being overlooked?

How were the seven people chosen to oversee the food distribution? What qualifications did they need to have?

Are different people called to different roles and tasks within the Church? If so, how do we figure out which roles we are supposed to do?

What is the danger of people not doing their roles in the Church?

What is your role in the Church? What is your full-time ministry for the Lord? Are you doing it?

Has the Church commissioned you to do it (by laying on hands, or in some other way)? Should the Church do that? What difference would it make?

What was the immediate result for the Church stemming from the apostles' decision?



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witness

Continue reading through the entire books of Luke and Acts with one other person. If the other person is a fellow believer, read them through in a public place, like a café (not yelling it out or anything, just reading it to one another). Make a regular time to come in and read together, and more likely than not someone will eventually ask you what you are reading and why.

If the other person is not a fellow-believer, perhaps choose a less public place to read, but again set regular times, daily if possible, to get together and read the Gospel. You don't have to read it all at once. Read two to three chapters at a time, and then meet another day to read some more.

If you are in Vancouver, join in with one of 614's outreach ministries such as League of Mercy, Night Vision, or Street Combat.

People were grumbling about how the apostles were overseeing the distribution of money to the widows. First of all, Christians should not be grumbling at all (**Phil 2:14, 1 Pet 4:9**). But if needed funds are available and are not getting to the people who need them, or if there is some unfairness in how the funds are being distributed, it suggests that better administration is required. How is your cell doing at collecting offerings for the work of the cell, and for distribution to sponsored children? Does it need some better administration? Is there someone in the cell who the cell can commission for that role?

action points

Think through this week what you think your role in the Church is. What qualifies you for that role? Does the Church agree that you are meant to be fulfilling that role? What gifts has God given you to give to the Church? Are you exercising those gifts? Think and pray it through on your own, and then talk and pray it through with some others in your cell as well. Come up with some ideas of what role you are filling or should be filling within the body of Christ, and bring it to cell next week to discuss. Think, in particular, of what role you can be filling within or through the cell.

leader's guide

In this passage Luke shows us a much more subtle danger to the new Church than outright persecution or internal moral compromise. It is good and right to provide social care for those in our communities who cannot provide for themselves, in the case of this story, to widows. But, and this sometimes upsets people, the apostles should not have been the ones organising this social care. The big danger to the Church here was distraction.

We might often think something that is distracting is a bad thing. But this is not necessarily true. In fact, the most dangerous distractions are all the other good things we could be doing, but maybe should not be doing. Again, distributing food to widows is far from a bad thing; it is actually a deep concern of God's (**Ex 22:22ff, Deut 10:18**), a veritable command from God to his people. So how could it be wrong for the apostles to be doing this thing? It is wrong if it is not their role, not their task. They were given a very specific role and task, to teach and preach and pray. This is what they should have been spending their time and energy on. If they did not do this, then they would not be teaching and preaching well, and the result would have been weak Christians, and no defence against false doctrine.



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In addition, because they were giving part of their attention to preaching, and part of their attention to food distribution, they weren't even doing the food distribution well. Greek-speaking widows, that is, Jewish women who had come to Jerusalem from other parts of the world, were not getting the food that they needed. They felt they were being overlooked, and that Jewish widows from Palestine who spoke Aramaic were getting more than their share. There was a very real danger here of a cultural divide in the Church, a tension that had existed within Jewish circles for some time that was carried over into the new community, and that would become even more pronounced later on as the Church begins its mission to the Gentiles, (even though Christ had already abolished those distinctions as spiritually unimportant – **Col 3:11**). So the apostles, realising their error and the potential danger of division, brought the Church together to help choose people to oversee the distribution of food, to "wait on tables". It has been famously noted that all seven chosen had Greek names, suggesting that in an effort to redress the balance the Church chose Greek-speaking Jews to oversee the distribution of food. Greek names do not in and of themselves mean that those chosen were Hellenistic Jews, but it is possible. At any rate, the apostles delegated this task and commissioned the seven to fulfill this task by the laying on of hands and by praying for the Spirit's power, thus conferring on them the authority to act on their behalf.

There is a temptation here to conclude that preaching and waiting tables were weighed up, and preaching was determined to be more important. This is true, in a way. For the apostles, preaching was more important. But for those chosen to distribute food, distributing food was more important. That is, ensuring the proper and fair allotment of resources and care was what they were to focus on. Preaching and teaching is a different ministry from social ministry. Neither is superior to the other, both are required, and both need people who are wise and filled with the Spirit of God (these were the requirements for the seven chosen in the Acts story). This is a story not so much about the relative importance of preaching versus charity, but about people in the Church filling their roles and tasks in the best way they can. Different people are gifted and tasked for different roles, and it is vitally important that people fill those roles and exercise those gifts, or else the ministry of the Church suffers. The pastor ends up doing things he or she should not be doing, at the expense of what he or she should be doing (leading to burn out and poorly done work), and the congregation fails to grow and mature in their giftings. This does not mean that pastors should never exercise charity, nor that those responsible for social care should never preach (Stephen and Philip are clearly shown doing this in the next few chapters); just that it is not possible to focus on everything and do it well. A division of labour within the Church is both good and necessary.

Every single Christian is called to full-time ministry for the Lord. Some are called to exercise that ministry through preaching, others through social concern, others in business, others in the home, others in schools, etc... The important thing to remember is that the apostles commissioned the overseers for this role through the laying on of hands; that is, the Church agreed with these servants and the role they were called to do, and released them to do it. They were not lone rangers, going off and doing their own thing without a care for what the rest of the Church thought. They grounded their ministry within the whole ministry of the Church, thereby receiving authority and support for their role.

We should be releasing our preachers and teachers to pray, study, preach and teach, and our preachers and teachers should be releasing others to exercise their spiritual gifts, and all of it for the glory of God. The immediate result, recorded by Luke, of the apostles' decision to do this was that the word of God spread, even to the point of priests coming to accept Jesus and Lord, indicating that the growth was not just amongst the Hellenistic Jews, but amongst the Jews from Jerusalem as well.