

## Acts 6:1-7 “Growing Pains”

This initially appears like second threat to unity after Ananias & Saphira's lies. In some respects it could be, but this is also about growing pains within the church as many believers are daily being added to their numbers and this is an opportunity for success and greater unity.

### I. Growing Pains Vs 1

**Vs. 1a** *“Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number a complaint arose”*

- Now at this time = literally “in these days”
- This is a continuation of **Vs. 42** *“kept right on teaching & preaching Jesus as the Christ”*
  - This is a repeated phrase we have seen many times
  - Luke uses the Active mood as opposed to passive mood (It is the activities of the Disciples that is promoting their growth)
  - This is not to ignore the hand of God, but reveals their own efforts and activities to Disciple one another and new believers resulting in growth among themselves.
- **Disciple:** This is first time this term is used in Acts for followers of Jesus
  - The result is many being taught about Jesus and now believers or followers of Jesus.

### A Complaint Arose

**Vs. 1b** *“A complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.”*

### Who Were the Hellenistic Jews?

- Hellenists were commonly understood to be Greek speaking Jews. But the differences are more than just linguistics. Hellenist Jews adopted a large part of Greek culture.
- Hellenist widows were being overlooked when food was being served or distributed.
- This is likely happening because mainline orthodox Jews were administering the food

### What Was the Complaint?

- Complaint = ASV says *“murmuring”* Used (4) times in New Test.
- Same word **John 7:12** *“many murmured about Jesus leading the crowds astray”*
  - Phil 2:12** *“do all things without murmuring and questioning”*
  - I Pet 4:9** *“using hospitality one to another without murmuring”*
- Murmuring generally isn't a good thing and we are not to murmur against God
- In this case, the Hellenists had a legitimate complaint. They had a reason for murmuring
- This was a complaint against or towards the Hebraic Jews, not just about the problem.

### Why Is This a Problem? 4 Reasons

- 1. The Resources Were to Be Used for the Entire Body of Christ.** 4:32, 34 *“nobody in need”*
  - This could become a cultural division within church.
- 2. Treating Some Differently Shows Favoritism**
  - James warns of showing favoritism. Paul cautioned divisions and sects in Corinth.
- 3. Complaining Against One Another Which Is Warned Against in Scripture**
  - **Col. 3:12-13, James 5:9, I Peter 4:8-10**
- 4. Neglecting Care for Widows & Orphans is Antithetical to the Character of God**
  - Duet. 10:18, 16:11,14, 24:17, 19-21, 26:12-13, Job 31:16, Psalm 146:9, Isaiah 1:17, 23, Jer. 7:6, Mal. 3:5, I Tim. 5, James 1:27

All growing organizations face hurdles. Small churches might struggle with man-power & volunteers  
Large mega churches struggle with cliques and popularity groups, maturing their masses.

## **II. Adaptation to the Growth Response to the Complaint Vs. 2-4**

**Vs. 2** *“And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said “it is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables.”*

- **“The Twelve”** refers to the Apostles.
  - It appears they would have been perfectly willing to do this task without bias themselves if it made sense for them to do so.
  - We don’t see an indication that they were “too good” for this task.
  - We might look at this another way “this is not what God called them to do.”
  - This task of serving tables IS NO LESS IMPORTANT than preaching & teaching. BUT, it cannot occur at the expense of preaching & teaching.
- **Diakonia** (noun) = minister, ministering, serve, serving.
  - Same root is used for the ministry of serving tables and ministry of the word.
  - Both of these activities are necessary for the health, function, & growth of the church.

### **Church Today Might Have a Misconception About How the Apostles Viewed Serving Tables**

- Contemporary church is often guilty of the same things as Corinth.
- We prioritize flashier gifts. They put tongues and prophecy on a pedestal.
- Many people build up preaching & teaching

The best leaders are not the ones who say I’m the best at all these task so I’ll do them all.  
The best leaders recognize where they’re called and how to recognize the calling in other’s lives.

### **Apostles Empowered Other Qualified Men to Minister Meals**

**Vs. 3** *“Select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.”*

- **“Task”** is better rendered as *“Need”* or *“Necessary Work”*
  - Apostles understood others needed to oversee these needs, to take charge of these tasks.
- **Moses & Jethro Exodus 18:13-27**

### **Apostles Give 4 Qualifications for Choosing Men to Minister at Meals**

(Qualifications look very similar to Paul’s qualifications in Timothy)

1. **Brethren** (men within our fellowship, believers, disciples of Jesus)
  - This is similar to choosing of Matthias. Must be one with us the whole time.
2. **Good reputation** (also the word for witness)
  - Pick men who have exhibited experience to handle this. They’ve proven themselves
3. **Full of the Spirit**
  - This can mean for a task. Or it can mean that Holy Spirit permeates everything they do.
4. **Full of Wisdom**
  - Practical application of knowledge. Understanding God’s Word, His thoughts, His character

### **Pam & Jackie**

Both of these women came to us and said “we just want to be used by God”.

### III. The Result of Empowering Others Vs. 5-7

- **Vs. 5** Luke may specifically reference Stephen because of what he is about to tell us about Stephen in the next section. They were full of faith and the of the Holy Spirit. And they were faithful in their duties.
- **Vs. 6** *“And they brought these men before the apostles and after praying, they laid hands on them”*
  - Apostles perform a commissioning of these men
  - They **pray for them** • They **lay hands on them**.
  - The apostles are empowering these men to take charge of the tasks that are at hand.
- This was likely a **public** event which was witnessed by many and confirmed by many.
- A public demonstration and declaration that:
  1. The multitudes approved of these men as having selected them.
  2. The apostles approve of these men by praying for them and laying hands
  3. That God has approved of these men.

#### **This Commissioning of the 7 Men Gives them Credibility**

- With this credibility also comes responsibility.
- They occupy an office in God’s church now. They are held to a high standard.

#### **As Others Were Empowered in Their Calling, The Church Continued to Grow**

- **Vs. 7** *“And the word of God kept on spreading, and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.”*
- Luke notes that many continued to come to Christ in **Jerusalem**.
  - He may have said this knowing in his mind that the Gospel will soon be extended outside.
- Luke mentions that even **a great number of priests** were coming obedient to the faith.
  - The biggest critics of the church are becoming converts as a result of church functioning.
- We will also see that these men were perfectly capable of administering the word themselves via Stephen’s own defense and sermon and Phillip’s ministry to the Ethiopian.

#### **Points for Us**

1. Growth typically results in growing pains. This is obvious in the church, but also includes our own personal lives. In the **Vineyard** Jesus gave parable of vine-keeper who constructively prunes for more fruit.
2. We should be willing to walk-in and exercise our calling for the glory of God which also includes abstaining from areas where we’re not called. The apostles understood what God had called them to. They were not willing to be derailed by tending to other matters that they could have addressed and done just fine.
3. God’s provision for growth precedes the growing pains. God had already established these 7 men as worthy of these new responsibilities. They had shown themselves worthy. It was now time for the church to officially empower them.