

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth

Sunday, August 9th, 2026

Rev. Gerry Gallant

The Trellis and the Vine: How Christ Orders His Church for Grace and Growth

Proper 14

Acts 6:1-7

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; His greatness is unsearchable.

One generation shall commend Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts.

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

The Lord is good to all, and His mercy is over all that He has made.

In the early days the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

And the Word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly.

Come, let us worship the risen Christ, who builds His church and cares for every member of His body.

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Almighty and everlasting God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

We lift our hearts in adoration to You, the living God who raised Your Son from the dead and poured out Your Spirit upon the church. You are the Builder of the house; You are the Shepherd of the flock; You are the Head of the body. From one hundred and twenty in an upper room You have gathered a multitude from every nation, and still You are adding to Your church those who are being saved.

We praise You that the Word of God continues to increase, that the gospel advances even through difficulty, and that Christ remains sovereign over every challenge His people face. You do not abandon the widow or the overlooked; You do not leave Your

servants without wisdom; You do not permit the gates of hell to prevail against Your church.

As we gather this day, send Your Holy Spirit among us. Open our eyes to see Christ more clearly, our ears to hear His Word more attentively, and our hearts to serve one another more faithfully. Guard the ministry of the Word among us, and raise up servants full of the Spirit and of wisdom, that both mercy and proclamation may flourish under the lordship of Jesus.

We ask this in the name of our risen Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. **Amen.**

Call to Confession

Brothers and sisters, the same Word that builds the church also searches our hearts. Let us therefore come before the Lord with honesty, confessing the ways we have overlooked the vulnerable, neglected prayer, crowded out the Word, or murmured against one another. The Lord is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful Father,
We confess that we have often prayed for growth while remaining unprepared for the responsibilities it brings.
We have neglected those who are easily overlooked
the lonely, the newcomer, the widow, the quiet sufferer
while busying ourselves with lesser things.
We have allowed good activities to crowd out prayer and the ministry of the Word.
We have murmured when we should have listened,
and defended ourselves when we should have humbled ourselves.

Forgive us for measuring faithfulness by busyness rather than by obedience to our calling.

Forgive us for treating some ministries as important and others as optional.

Forgive us for forgetting that every member of the body is needed,
and that practical service done in Christ's name is true worship.

Have mercy upon us, O Lord.

Cleanse us by the blood of Your Son.

Renew a right spirit within us,
and restore to us the joy of Your salvation,
that we may serve You with undivided hearts.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news of the gospel:

At the cross, the Lord Jesus was treated as an outsider so that outsiders might be welcomed into the family of God. He was forsaken so that His people would never be forsaken. He bore our neglect and our murmuring, our busyness and our blindness, and in exchange He gives us His perfect righteousness and the promise, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

To you who truly repent and believe: your sins are forgiven. Go in peace, and serve the Lord with gladness.

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name
Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one
For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever, Amen.**

Hymn #292: "Father, I Adore You"

Father, I adore you, lay my life before you.
How I love you.

Jesus, I adore you, lay my life before you.
How I love you.

Spirit, I adore you, lay my life before you.
How I love you.

Responsive Reading

Psalms 145:8-18

⁸The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

⁹**The Lord is good to all,
and his mercy is over all that he has made.**

¹⁰All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord,

and all your saints shall bless you!

**¹¹ They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom
and tell of your power,**

**¹² to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.**

**¹³ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures throughout all generations.
[The Lord is faithful in all his words
and kind in all his works.]**

**¹⁴ The Lord upholds all who are falling
and raises up all who are bowed down.**

**¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.**

**¹⁶ You open your hand;
you satisfy the desire of every living thing.**

**¹⁷ The Lord is righteous in all his ways
and kind in all his works.**

**¹⁸ The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.**

Anthem (Music Ministry)

Prayer for Illumination

Scripture

Acts 6:1-7

6 Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." ⁵ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷ And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Sermon

Sometimes the very blessings that we pray for become the places where Christ reveals what still needs His grace in our lives.

Every growing family discovers this truth. They pray for the blessing of children, without fully understanding how that blessing brings new responsibilities.

They learn that one child is fairly easy to care for. Three children require more planning. And a family any larger than that requires routines, schedules, responsibilities, and careful attention. Nothing is wrong with the larger family; the challenges simply exist because the family is growing.

The same is true of the church.

Church growth is a blessing from God, but when the Lord answers that prayer, the church needs to pray for wisdom, humility, order, patience, and love.

More people means more needs. More needs mean more opportunities for misunderstanding. More relationships mean more places where someone may feel forgotten, overlooked, or unseen.

In the Scripture we are looking at today, the church in Jerusalem is experiencing an extraordinary blessing. What began with one hundred and twenty believers gathered together in a small upper room has now become what is described as a multitude.

The risen Christ is doing exactly what He promised He would do. He is building His church and the Word of God is spreading through Jerusalem.

And yet, right in the middle of this remarkable season of blessing, a problem appears.

This is not the first challenge the early church has faced. As we have seen in the first few chapters of Acts, Satan has already tried to stop the church through persecution and corruption.

Persecution could not silence the church, and corruption could not corrupt it. Now the enemy changes tactics: perhaps distraction and division will succeed.

Perhaps the apostles can be pulled away from prayer and the ministry of the Word. Perhaps the congregation can be divided along old cultural and linguistic lines. Perhaps a real need can become a bitter complaint.

Perhaps what begins as practical neglect can become spiritual damage.

And still today, distraction and division remain among the enemy's most effective weapons against the church.

However, we should not worry, as we have seen already every time Satan attacks the church, Christ uses that attack to advance the Gospel. Persecution failed. Hypocrisy failed. Now division will fail. Not because the church is strong, but because her risen Lord is stronger.

That is why Acts 6 is so helpful. It shows us how Christ leads His church through a real problem without allowing the problem to become the controlling story.

The scripture starts simply.

Acts 6:1

'Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.'

Notice carefully how the Scripture connects the problem to growth. The complaint arose 'when the disciples were increasing in number.' Growth was not the problem; instead growth revealed a problem.

The church was thriving and the blessing of growth exposed weaknesses that had gone unnoticed before. Systems that may have worked when the church was smaller were no longer sufficient. Informal patterns of care that once seemed adequate were now failing and God's people were being missed.

The Scripture focuses on two specific groups within the church: the Hellenists and the Hebrews.

Both groups were Jewish believers in Jesus, but they came from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The Hebrews were primarily Aramaic-speaking Jews rooted

around Jerusalem, while the Hellenists were Greek-speaking Jews shaped by communities throughout the wider Greek-speaking world.

The church was one in Christ, but that oneness still had to be lived out with patience, humility, and love. The Gospel creates a unity deeper than culture, but it does not instantly erase every difference, old habit of thought, or inherited suspicion. One group can become visible because it is better known, while another is overlooked because it is less connected.

The widows of the Hellenists were being neglected in the daily distribution. And that was a big deal. Throughout Scripture, widows are repeatedly identified as those who require special care from the covenant community. The Lord is the defender of widows. He commands His people not to exploit them, not to forget them, not to overlook them, but to care for them.

This is because in the ancient world, widows were often among the most vulnerable people in society. Without a husband, and often without reliable family support, they could easily fall into poverty. The church in Jerusalem had rightly taken up the responsibility of mercy and there was a daily distribution of food and support. The church was trying to care for its own.

But somewhere in that daily ministry, the Greek-speaking widows were being missed.

Many scholars believe these Greek-speaking widows were especially vulnerable. Many Hellenistic Jews had returned from throughout the Roman Empire to spend their final years in Jerusalem, hoping to die in the Holy City. Unlike many of the local Hebrew-speaking widows, they most likely did not have extended family nearby to care for them after the death of their husband. If that was the case, they depended almost entirely upon the compassion of the church. Whether the neglect resulted from language barriers, unfamiliarity, or simple administrative weakness, the effect was the same: some of Christ's most vulnerable people were being overlooked. That is precisely the kind of person the Lord repeatedly commands His people to remember.

This serves as a humbling wake-up call for all of us. Real harm doesn't require sin to wear an obvious villain's face. Often, people suffer not from deliberate cruelty, but from simple invisibility—overlooked by those around them.

Neglect is usually quiet. Someone stops attending and no one calls. A widow sits alone and no one sees. A new family comes for weeks and no one learns their names. People can disappear in the corners while quietly wondering whether anyone notices.

This shows that growth demands more than passion alone—it calls for careful shepherding, genuine service, thoughtful organization, and love. And when people voice the concern, "We're being overlooked," the church's first instinct shouldn't be to defend itself, but to respond with humility and a readiness to truly listen.

The word that the Scripture uses for 'complaint' carries the idea of murmuring or grumbling.

That word is meant to remind us of Israel in the wilderness. It warns us of how legitimate concerns can become spiritually dangerous if they are handled wrongly. A real need can become bitterness, a true problem can become gossip, and a necessary correction can become division if it is not brought under the Lordship of Christ.

Verse 1 therefore holds two truths together: the widows needed care, and the unity of the church needed protection.

And Christ, in His mercy, brought the issue into the light. That is good news.

John Calvin makes a wonderful observation on this passage when he writes, '**Bad customs give rise to good laws.**' He was not excusing neglect. Rather, he was reminding us that in God's providence, the Lord often uses difficulties within His church to establish wiser and healthier patterns of ministry. What first appears to be a setback frequently becomes proof of Christ's faithful care for His people. The very problem that Satan hoped would divide the church becomes the means Christ used to strengthen it.

At times, the Lord brings weaknesses to light not to tear His church down, but to build it up. He sometimes permits a problem to surface so His people can grow in wisdom. He may expose areas of neglect precisely so the body can become more faithful, more loving, more mature, and more useful in His service.

What Satan means for division, Christ can transform into growth. What might have splintered the church becomes instead, by God's grace, an opportunity for greater order, deeper love, and further advance of the Gospel..

So the first movement is clear: Christ exposes a real problem, not to destroy His church, but to strengthen it.

Acts 6:2

'And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables."

At first hearing, that statement might seem harsh. Were the apostles claiming their work was too important to bother with widows? Were they ranking preaching above mercy in a way that devalued the poor?

But that's not what's happening here at all. These were men who had walked alongside Jesus himself. They had witnessed Him touch lepers, feed the hungry, welcome children, heal the sick, and extend compassion to the weak. They had seen the Son of Man arrive not to be served, but to serve others. Far from dismissing practical mercy, they were safeguarding the right ordering of Christ's church.

The issue here is not importance. The issue is calling.

The apostles weren't claiming that serving others didn't matter. They were saying it wasn't right for them to walk away from the specific work Christ had entrusted to them.

They had been appointed as eyewitnesses to the resurrection. Their calling was to preach Christ, testify to His death and resurrection, teach apostolic doctrine, and lay the foundation of the New Testament church under the authority of the risen Lord.

Had they become absorbed in overseeing daily distribution—even for a good and necessary cause—the ministry of the Word would have suffered. And when the ministry of the Word suffers, the whole church suffers with it.

That's a principle every church needs to grasp, especially in our day, when congregations often expect their pastor to have a hand in everything the church does.

Good and necessary things turn dangerous the moment they crowd out what's meant to be first. The devil rarely needs to lure a church into obvious sin; often he only needs to bury it under an avalanche of good activities—until prayer grows weak, preaching turns shallow, discipleship gets neglected, and the Word itself is compromised.

Imagine a hospital where every surgeon spent most of the day completing paperwork instead of treating patients. Records matter. Organization matters. But if the doctors never reached the operating room, the hospital would have forgotten its primary purpose. In the same way, church organization exists to support the ministry of the Word, not crowd it out. The apostles were not avoiding work; they were protecting the work Christ had specifically entrusted to them.

It is a reminder for us that a church can be busy and at the same time spiritually weak. The apostles saw the danger immediately. The widows must not be neglected, and the Word must not be neglected.

One of the most beautiful details in this passage is the language used.

The Scripture deliberately uses the same family of Greek words throughout this passage. The daily distribution is described as *diakonia*—a ministry or service. Serving tables is *diakonein*—to minister. Then, in verse 4, the apostles speak of "the ministry (*diakonia*) of the Word."

God wants us to see that both are genuine ministries. One serves physical needs; the other serves spiritual needs. Neither is worldly. Neither is beneath the dignity of Christ's servants.

Both are sacred acts of service offered to the same Lord. The distinction is not between important work and unimportant work, but between different callings within the same body.

The daily distribution is ministry. Serving tables is ministry. The ministry of the Word is ministry.

Mercy and preaching are both forms of service under Christ, because the widows matter too much to be neglected, and the Word matters too much to be neglected.

So we must never split the church's work into "important" and "unimportant" ministry. Preaching, mercy, administration, hospitality, and quiet service all become sacred when offered to Christ.

That's the wisdom found in Acts 6. The church doesn't have to choose between Word and mercy—it places both under the Lordship of Christ. It doesn't say, "We'll preach and neglect the vulnerable," nor does it say, "We'll meet practical needs and let preaching slide." Instead it says, "Christ has appointed both. Christ cares about both. Christ must rule over both."

Here we need to recover a thoroughly Biblical understanding of calling within the church.

Faithfulness isn't measured by doing everything—it's measured by doing what God has specifically called you to do. God doesn't assign the same task to every member of the body.

The eye isn't the hand. The foot isn't the ear. The preacher isn't the deacon. The teacher isn't the administrator. Those who lead publicly are worth no more than those who serve quietly.

The whole body belongs to Christ, and every member matters. This means that the church thrives not when a handful of people try to carry everything, but when each member serves according to the gifts and opportunities Christ has given them.

That's why the apostles bring the entire congregation together. They don't hide the problem or treat it as insignificant. They don't get defensive, and they don't accuse the Hellenists of stirring up division. Instead, they call together the full number of disciples and bring the matter out into the open.

The apostles lead, but they don't dominate. The congregation takes part, but doesn't drift without direction. The apostles establish the Biblical priority, then invite the body to help work out the solution. Christ governs His church through His Word, and under that Word we find both order and participation, both authority and humility, both shepherding and service.

This is one reason genuinely Presbyterian churches have always maintained that Christ rules His church not through the personality of a single individual, but through the ordinary ministry of His Word—faithfully preached, faithfully taught, and wisely overseen by elders He Himself has called. Our confidence rests not in human leadership, but in Christ, the Chief Shepherd of His flock.

In a healthy church, leaders shouldn't grow defensive when real needs surface, and the congregation shouldn't answer those needs with grumbling and division. Leaders must lead. The body must serve. The Word must govern. Prayer must undergird it all. Christ must remain Head of His church. When that happens, even difficult problems can become occasions for grace.

Having settled the priority, the apostles now turn to the provision. The widows still need care—but the answer isn't neglecting the Word. The answer is Spirit-filled service.

Acts 6:3

'Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.'

Verse 3 shows that practical ministry is spiritual ministry. Therefore the servants must be known for character, fullness of the Spirit, and wisdom. And now verse 4 explains why this provision mattered so much.

Acts 6:4

'But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.'

Notice the order. Prayer comes first. They say, 'prayer and the ministry of the word.' That order is not accidental. Prayer is the church's confession of dependence. Prayer says, 'Lord, unless You build the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless You open blind eyes, no one will see. Unless You soften hard hearts, no one will repent. Unless You bless the Word, our preaching will be only sound in the air.'

Samuel Chadwick once wrote, "The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, or prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray." Chadwick was not suggesting that prayer replaces faithful labor. Rather, he was reminding us that every true ministry depends entirely upon God's power. The apostles understood that. Before they devoted themselves to preaching, they devoted themselves to prayer.

The apostles knew that sermons do not save by human skill. Organization does not save. Personality does not save. Christ saves; it is the Holy Spirit who gives life. Therefore, prayer must come first.

Brothers and sisters, a prayerless ministry may be busy, but it will not be powerful. A prayerless church may be active, but it will not be healthy. A prayerless Christian may be disciplined, but he will not be spiritually fruitful.

The truth is that we can organize, plan, teach, serve, sing, and labor, but if we are not dependent upon the Lord, we are trying to do spiritual work in the strength of the flesh. The apostles refuse that path. They know the church's greatest need is not merely better administration, though better administration is needed. The church's greatest need is God Himself. And God has appointed prayer as the means by which His people express their dependence upon Him.

But prayer is not alone. The apostles devote themselves also to the ministry of the Word. The church cannot live without the Word of God. Widows need bread, yes. But the whole congregation needs the living bread of God's truth. Jesus Himself made this priority unmistakable when He answered the tempter in the wilderness:

Matthew 4:4

'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'

Strip away the Word, and faith doesn't just weaken—it starves. Strip away the Word, and doctrine doesn't merely drift—it collapses into whatever the culture demands next. Strip away the Word, and comfort curdles into empty sentiment with no power to heal. Strip away the Word, and mercy loses its Gospel shape, becoming nothing more than

humanitarianism with a Christian label. Strip away the Word, and the church stops being the body of Christ altogether—it becomes a religious club doing nice things, severed from the voice that gives it life.

This is why preaching cannot be optional, cannot be secondary, cannot be crowded out by anything else the church decides is more urgent. Not because the preacher matters—he doesn't, not in himself. Christ matters. The Word is central because it is the very place where Christ speaks.

Through the Word He convicts sinners who would otherwise stay comfortable in sin. He comforts saints who would otherwise be crushed by grief. He exposes idols that would otherwise go on ruling unchallenged. He strengthens faith that would otherwise buckle under pressure. He reveals His glory that would otherwise stay hidden from a blind world. He calls His church to an obedience it would otherwise never choose on its own.

A church that neglects the Word will lose its way—not eventually, but inevitably—no matter how impressive its activity looks from the outside. But a church that guards the Word, prays over the Word, submits to the Word, and obeys the Word plants itself exactly where Christ has promised to pour out His blessing, and nothing can move it from that ground.

Acts chapter 6 teaches us that Christ protects His church through Biblical priorities. The apostles do not ignore mercy—they protect it. They do not abandon the Word—they guard it with their lives. They do not exalt themselves—they submit to their calling. They do not silence the congregation—they draw it in.

They pray. They seek Spirit-filled servants. They order the life of the church under Christ. This is faith and order held together, Word and mercy held together, prayer and service held together—Christ Himself caring for His church by teaching His people what must never be displaced from first place.

From here the passage widens its scope to the provision itself. The church isn't merely solving an administrative headache; it is learning how the whole body serves under the lordship of Christ.

One of the great lessons of Acts 6 is that the church was never meant to be sustained by a handful of people carrying all the weight while everyone else watches from the sidelines.

Christ has designed His church as a body, and a healthy body functions when every part does its work. This problem would not be solved merely by stronger leadership, but by more servants.

Brothers and sisters, that lesson is just as important today as it was in Jerusalem. One of the great misconceptions of modern church life is the idea that ministry belongs primarily to pastors, elders, deacons, and a small handful of active volunteers.

Many Christians unconsciously think of ministry as what happens at the front of the church on Sunday morning. Ministry is preaching. Ministry is leading. Ministry is teaching. Ministry is visible service. But the New Testament presents a much richer picture than that.

Every believer has been saved to serve—not as an option, but as part of what it means to belong to Christ. Not every believer serves the same way, but every believer has gifts to use, people to love, and a role to fill in the life of Christ's church. No exceptions. No bystanders.

Think of the quiet ministries that already sustain the life of this congregation. Some of you pray for the Sunday services and for specific people in the church week after week. Some write a short note or send a text when someone is sick or discouraged. Some prepare a meal when a family is under pressure. Some quietly take care of the children so parents can sit under the Word. Some notice the person sitting alone after the service and simply sit with them for a few minutes. Some look after practical needs around the building or help with the logistics of gatherings.

None of these things make headlines. Most of them will never be announced from the front. Yet every one of them matters to Christ, and if they suddenly stopped, this church would feel the loss immediately.

The question was never whether you have a ministry. If you belong to Christ, you do—full stop, no debate, settled the day He saved you. The real question, the one that should unsettle you, is whether you are faithfully serving where He has placed you, or whether you have quietly gone astray while the body absorbs the cost of your absence.

For some, faithfulness means staying the course in the unseen work you are already doing—do not despise it, and do not stop. For others, it means finally taking the step you have been putting off: visiting the one who is housebound and forgotten, showing up for the next church meal instead of leaving it to the same tired few, committing—not merely intending—to pray by name for the preaching of the Word and for the ones who are struggling.

So stop asking, "Is the church serving me?" That question will hollow you out if you let it run unchecked. Ask instead, "How is Christ calling me to serve His people here in this

church?" That is the question of someone who belongs to the body—not someone who merely occupies a seat in it.

We too often draw a hard line between the practical and the spiritual, as though one is holy and the other merely helpful. Scripture draws no such line. When a meal is delivered, when a grieving family is cared for, when a struggling saint is encouraged in Christ's name, that is spiritual ministry—not a lesser substitute for it. Practical service done out of love for Christ and His people is not preparation for worship. It is worship.

One of the most beautiful pictures of this kind of ministry unfolds after a funeral. Someone prepares food. Someone pours coffee. Someone arranges chairs, welcomes grieving guests at the door, sits in silence beside those who cannot speak, and washes the dishes long after everyone else has gone home and forgotten the mess remained.

Not one of them stands in the spotlight. Yet every single act declares the heart of Christ and says, "You are not forgotten. The body of Christ loves you. You matter to God, and therefore you matter to us." That is not a small thing. That is the Gospel made visible in casserole dishes and folded chairs.

Some of you serve publicly. Some of you serve in the shadows where no one claps. Some of you teach. Some of you encourage. Some of you organize. Some of you pray, unseen and unheralded. Some of you visit the forgotten. Some of you disciple one soul at a time. Some of you serve so far behind the scenes that almost no one on earth ever notices.

But heaven notices. Every single time. The Lord Himself is watching, and He does not forget.

The world celebrates prominence, but Christ celebrates faithfulness.

In verse 5, the whole congregation approved this plan and chose seven men, among them a man named Stephen, described as full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. In verse 6, the congregation presented these seven to the apostles, who prayed and laid hands on them.

That is why Stephen's inclusion here is so significant. Before Stephen ever stood before the Sanhedrin, before he preached one of the greatest sermons recorded in Acts, and before he became the church's first martyr, he quietly served neglected widows.

That is often Christ's pattern. We sometimes dream about great usefulness in His kingdom, but He ordinarily prepares His servants through ordinary faithfulness. Hidden

obedience shapes public ministry. Character is formed long before influence is entrusted. Christ teaches His servants to serve before He calls many of them to lead.

Faithfulness in small things prepares us for greater usefulness. Faithfulness in hidden things reveals the condition of our hearts. Faithfulness when no one is watching often matters more than faithfulness when everyone is watching.

Brothers and sisters, a healthy church is not one where a few people carry the ministry while everyone else consumes the ministry. A healthy church is one where every member asks, 'How can I serve Christ by serving His people?'

And that is exactly what happens in Acts 6. The church identifies godly servants, shares the work, cares for the vulnerable, protects the ministry of the Word, and reflects the heart of its Saviour more clearly.

After the seven men were chosen, they were set before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands upon them. This simple act of prayer and commissioning, done in the presence of the whole congregation, marked the church's recognition that these men were being set apart by God for a spiritual work, not merely assigned a practical task.

The church had listened to the concern. The church had responded with wisdom. Spirit-filled servants had been identified.

That brings us to the final movement in verse 7: the result.

Acts 6:7

'And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.'

Throughout the book of Acts we are reminded that despite every obstacle, despite every attack, despite every difficulty, Christ continues to accomplish His purposes.

Persecution could not silence the Gospel. Hypocrisy could not corrupt Christ's church. Division could not stop its mission. Again and again, what Satan intends to hinder, Christ overrules for the advance of His kingdom. The risen Lord remains completely sovereign over every circumstance His church faces.

Notice carefully what the Scripture says. It does not first say the church increased, that the distribution system improved, or even that the complaint was resolved.

It says, "the Word of God continued to increase." Sit with that phrase—it is remarkable, almost strange. Words do not normally grow. Books do not multiply on their own. Messages do not expand by themselves; ink on a page has no life in it. Yet Scripture insists the Word itself is advancing across Jerusalem, spreading like fire, because it carries within it the life-giving power of the risen Christ.

Kingdoms rise and fall. Governments change hands. Philosophies flare up and burn out. Human movements swell and then fade into footnotes. But the Word of God does not fade. It does not stall. It does not need to be propped up by human ingenuity, because Christ Himself is alive, seated, and reigning over His church even now.

This is fundamental to understanding the entire book of Acts. The main character is not Peter. Not John. Not Stephen. Not Philip. Every one of them is a servant, not the hero. The true hero of Acts—the one driving every page—is the risen Lord Jesus Christ, working by His Spirit through His Word.

That has never changed. It has not changed in two thousand years, and it will not change now.

Too often churches are tempted to believe that growth ultimately depends upon leadership ability, organizational efficiency, financial resources, or attractive programs.

Yet Acts repeatedly points us somewhere else. The growth of the church is ultimately the work of Christ. He calls sinners to Himself. He opens blind eyes. He softens hard hearts. He grants repentance and faith. He gathers His sheep.

And yet Christ ordinarily accomplishes all of this through ordinary means. He works through the faithful preaching of His Word. He works through the prayers of His people. He works through the service of His saints. He works through the ordered ministry of the church.

That is exactly what we see in the Scripture. The complaint was addressed. The widows were cared for and the apostles remained devoted to prayer and preaching. The body embraced service. And as a result, the Word continued to increase.

This reminds us that church structures do not exist for their own sake—they exist to serve ministry. Organization exists to support mission, nothing more. Leadership exists to equip service, not to draw attention to itself. Everything—every committee, every meeting, every program—exists for one purpose: so that Christ's Word may advance. The moment any structure forgets that, it has become an idol, not a help.

One of the most helpful pictures here is the trellis and the vine.

A trellis by itself accomplishes almost nothing. It is dead wood. It cannot produce a single grape. It cannot create life out of nothing. But a vine left without a trellis does not stay wild and free—it collapses into a tangled, disorganized mess, choking its own fruitfulness on the ground. The trellis exists for one reason only: to hold up the living vine so it can bear fruit it could never bear alone.

That is exactly what Biblical order does within the church. Order does not produce spiritual life—only Christ does that, by His Spirit, through His Word. But Biblical order supports and protects the life Christ creates. Prayer and preaching are guarded. Mercy ministry is strengthened rather than left to chance. Needs are actually addressed instead of quietly ignored. Servants are mobilized instead of left standing idle. And because of all this, the Word of God continues to increase—not despite the order, but through it.

Notice the result. ‘The number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.’

Earlier in Acts it spoke of believers being added to the church. Now it is multiplication. The growth continues. The Gospel advances. The kingdom expands.

The complaint did not stop the mission. The difficulty did not derail the church. The challenge did not hinder Christ. Instead, through wise and godly handling, the challenge became another means through which Christ advanced His purposes.

Then the Scripture adds one more remarkable detail: ‘A great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.’

Think about that for a moment. These were men connected to the temple system. These were men whose lives revolved around sacrifices, ceremonies, and priestly service. Many of them would have known about Jesus. Many of them would have known about the hostility of the religious leaders toward Jesus and His followers. Yet now many were coming to faith.

The Gospel was reaching surprising places. Grace was reaching unexpected people. The kingdom was expanding exactly where many would have assumed it could not.

That is always Christ’s way. He delights to demonstrate that salvation belongs entirely to the Lord.

These priests became 'obedient to the faith.' That phrase is important. Faith is never mere agreement with certain facts. Faith receives Christ. Faith rests upon Christ. Faith submits to Christ. Saving faith produces obedient faith.

We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. But the faith that saves is never a dead faith. It is a living faith. It follows Christ. It bows before Christ. It seeks to obey Christ.

These priests were not merely persuaded intellectually. They became obedient to the faith. The Gospel transformed them.

But Luke is not merely showing us better church order. He is showing us Christ.

Everything in this passage points us to Christ. The apostles served the Word, and Jesus is the eternal Word made flesh. The seven served the vulnerable, and Jesus came not to be served but to serve. They noticed widows, and Jesus has always drawn near to the forgotten, the outcast, and the overlooked.

If we are honest, we all know something of being overlooked, disappointed, or burdened in ways others do not see.

Yet the Gospel tells us about One who entered a far deeper abandonment. At Calvary, Christ was forsaken. At Calvary, Christ bore the curse. At Calvary, Christ endured the judgment that belonged to us.

The sinless Son of God willingly stood in the place of sinners. The Holy One bore our guilt. The innocent One carried our condemnation. The beloved Son endured wrath so that His people could receive mercy.

Why?

Because at the cross the Lord Jesus took our place completely. He was treated as an outsider so that outsiders could be welcomed into the family of God. He was condemned so that guilty sinners could be justified. He bore our shame so that we might be clothed in His righteousness. He entered the darkness of God's judgment so that those who trust Him would never face that judgment themselves. He was forsaken so that His people would never be forsaken. He was, in the deepest possible sense, overlooked and rejected, so that every believer can know the everlasting promise, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." That is the Gospel that creates a church where no one is forgotten because Christ has not forgotten us.

That is the Gospel.

May God grant that among us. May He protect the ministry of His Word in this congregation — so that preaching remains central, prayer surrounds it, and neither is crowded out by the many good things that compete for our attention. May we as a people guard the time given to the public reading and preaching of Scripture, and may we pray specifically for those who open the Word among us. May He raise up servants among us who are full of the Spirit and of wisdom, men and women who are willing to serve the practical needs of the body so that the Word is not neglected. May He deepen our love for one another, preserve our unity across every difference, strengthen our witness in this community, and keep us faithful in both Word and service.

And may the Word of God continue to increase among us as we walk as Salt and Light in this dark and broken world. May Christ continue to build His church among us through His Word, by His Spirit, and for His glory, until the day faith becomes sight and we stand before the living Word Himself—even our Lord Jesus Christ—to whom be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Let us Pray,

O Lord our God,
who is the Fountain of all wisdom and the true Shepherd of Your flock:
We thank You that in Your gracious providence,
You use the trials and weaknesses of Your church not to destroy us,
but to order us in greater maturity, peace, and love.

We pray,
that You would preserve the sacred ministry of Your Word among us.
Grant that those who preach and teach may devote themselves faithfully to prayer and to Scripture, speaking not in human wisdom, but in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Raise up among us godly servants
men and women full of faith, wisdom, and the Holy Spirit
who will care for the practical needs of Your body.
Let no widow, no stranger, and no sorrowing soul be overlooked or forgotten in our midst.
Keep us from pride and division, and bind us together under the Lordship of Christ.

May Your living Word continue to increase and multiply in our hearts
and across our community,

that many would become obedient to the faith,
to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Adapted From John Calvin

Invitation to Offering

Offering Prayer

Closing Hymn #81: “Unto the Hills Around”

Unto the hills around do I lift up
my longing eyes;
oh whence for me shall my salvation come,
from whence arise?
From God the Lord doth come my certain aid,
from God the Lord who heaven and earth hath made.

He will not suffer that thy foot be moved:
safe shalt thou be.
No careless slumber shall his eyelids close,
who keepeth thee.
Behold, he sleepeth not, he slumbereth ne’er,
who keepeth Israel in his holy care.

Jehova is himself thy keeper true,
thy changeless shade;
Jehova thy defence on thy right hand
himself hath made,
and thee no sun by day shall ever smite;
no moon shall harm thee in the silent night.

Pastoral Prayer

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we thank You for the Word we have heard and for the Spirit who applies it to our hearts. We pray for this congregation: protect the ministry of the Word among us; keep prayer central; raise up servants full of faith and of the Holy Spirit who will care for the overlooked and the vulnerable.

We pray for those among us who feel unseen or forgotten—comfort them with the knowledge that Christ has not forgotten them. We pray for those who serve quietly and without recognition—strengthen their hands and assure them that heaven notices every act of faithfulness. We pray for unity across every difference of background, language, and preference, that the gospel may be visible in our life together.

We pray for the wider church, for pastors and elders, for deacons and servants of every kind, that Your people everywhere may hold Word and mercy together under the lordship of Christ. We pray for those who do not yet know You, that the Word of God may continue to increase and that many may become obedient to the faith.

And now, as we prepare to share fellowship with one another, we ask Your blessing upon the time that follows. May conversations be marked by genuine interest and kindness. May the lonely find company, the newcomer find welcome, and every member find opportunity to encourage another. Let our fellowship be an extension of the gospel we have heard—a living testimony that in Christ no one is overlooked.

All these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Benediction

Now may the God of peace,
who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,
the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,
equip you with everything good that you may do His will,
working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ,
to whom be glory forever and ever.

And may the Word of God continue to increase among you;
may you be found full of the Spirit and of wisdom;
may no member of the body be neglected;
and may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen.