

Series: Leading Well	Reference: Acts 6:1-7	Title: Empowerment	Date: 06.23.2019
Website Writeup: Continuing with our lessons on Leadership, today we have our lesson from the Disciples: Good leaders empower servant leaders.			

COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

We're in a four week series on leadership, taking a break this coming Sunday for baptisms!

So far, we've had two weeks of leadership lessons.
 First Jethro taught us in Exodus 18, good leaders delegate to able people.
 Then Moses taught us in Exodus 31, good leaders identify spiritual gifts in others.

Today's lesson is from the Disciples, who teach us, **Good Leaders Empower Servant Leaders.**

We're coming out of the Old Testament & into the New, in chapter 6 of the book of Acts. By this point Christ has ascended. The Disciples have received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. They've preached the Gospel profusely & there's been exponential growth in the Church as a result - 3000 souls, as a matter of fact, at the end of chapter 2. People have come to faith left & right, miracles & healings have occurred as signs of the in-breaking Kingdom of God. But all this isn't without cost.

The Disciples have been persecuted as a result. They've been instructed not to preach in the name of Christ, but were respectfully defiant, since they can't keep this Good News of the Gospel to themselves - so they preach, no matter consequence! The Church is growing in complexity. They've been slowly organizing as a result, just like we've seen in past weeks in the life of Moses as Israel came together as a people.

And we pick up the story in Acts 6:1-7...
In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

Oversight, or favoritism, we don't know - whatever the case, it has to be addressed. When a community grows, so does its need for organizational management & expanding leadership. Everything's spiritual, these very logistical/administrative issues included.

It continues...

² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together & said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Brothers & sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit &

wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer & the ministry of the word."

Just as Jethro taught Moses not to be bogged down with administrative detail, rather to pursue his calling as teacher & trainer, delegating others to take certain tasks, the Disciples needed to be free to seek God in prayer & ministry of the Word. Someone needs to take the much needed weight for the church to progress forward.

Think of it as being in a rowboat. You alone can row only a two-oared rowboat. But as you rescue people from a shipwreck, you need to upgrade to a new boat with more oars. You can't do all that work yourself. Those rescued must man an oar & start rowing to save others from the frigid shark infested waters. Eventually, when there are many hands on deck, you man the helm, keep watch & direct people in which direction to row the boat, and when to pluck survivors from the water.

It continues in v5...

⁵This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith & of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed & laid their hands on them.

They then designate these people to lead these very necessary tasks, and the result is... ⁷So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Now they're rowing a giant ship, with many people onboard, and more & more coming all the time!

We see in v1, **Good Things Happen even in the Midst of Chaos & Disorganization** (vs. 1, *In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.*)

How often do we look at chaos, or disorganization & think, "*How could anything good come from this?*"

I have three bees tattooed on my wrist & hand which represent God's movement in the local church - three representing the Trinity; Father, Son & Holy Spirit. But the bees also represent us as believers, the local church - Christ in us together in community.

If you've ever opened up a beehive you perceive only craziness. It looks totally disorganized & chaotic. Bees buzzing around everywhere. But if you look long enough there's order to that chaos. A lot of good honey's being produced to feed young larvae. Some bees are tasked with gathering. Others make the honeycomb. The Queen does her job of laying eggs. Some cool the hive off at the entrance by flapping their little wings. Everyone working for the benefit of the whole & its purpose of bringing life to others.

Bees are a great image of the local church, ordered chaos, perceived craziness, but productive towards one purpose - the glorification of Jesus among the nations!

This first verse of chapter 6 shows us, in spite of some pretty severe problems in caring for the poor & widows, the early church was still thriving, growing & multiplying. Some may focus only on the problem issue, not seeing the larger picture of all the good which is going on. Sometimes we become myopic honing in on problem issues, but not realizing the problems may be symptomatic of good growth! Or, opportunities for further growth.

Problems don't signify everything's a sham, a farce, a waste of time, or the whole of the body is broken. Rather, problems can sometimes signify growth is actually occurring. All churches go through tense times, seeing high emotion during times of transition, that's normal. Churches, like people, grow through stages from infancy, to the toddler years, to adolescence, then onto adulthood & maturity. Transitional times are simply an opportunity for leadership to identify issues & lead strongly through those unsettling feelings, revealing to others the great things which have been & are occurring, and can occur in the future!

The perceived chaos isn't a license for disorganization, rather it causes us to remember - God's working through His church, for His glory & by His Power! We're simply invited to join Him in His work in the world. Even when things seem a mess, God still multiplies disciples & accomplishes His will in the world despite our sin, brokenness, oversights, or simple miscommunications.

Another facet is - the widows had a voice & a place to share their concerns in the church. Many church members have seen struggle, hurt, or pain & immediately associate it with division. These godly women were voices of legitimate concern, which the apostles validated & addressed.

A couple weeks back we had a family meeting with all the moms & dads with kids in our children's ministry. We highlighted Kim's increasing role as our Children's Ministry Director, and our growing needs in this ministry. Everyone in attendance had good ideas. One of which was, "*Can we have a toddler's curriculum?*" And another, "*Can we have a better sign in & out system?*" There were other potential problems & good ideas voiced as well, which Kim listened to & plans to address as this ministry grows.

As leaders, we need to be humbly open to listen & be available to hear when others bring forward ideas & problems within our communities. This was done in a healthy way in Acts 6. People brought concern. The Disciples listened & implemented a solution. Our leadership's willing to listen & open to new ideas & concerns - they're trustworthy. We all have bad days & miscommunicate at times, everyone's human, and we work hard here at building a healthy culture which seeks unity & care.

At other times ideas might be voiced which just can't work, leaders need the freedom & opportunity to lead in those times as well. Sometimes they direct us away from decisions

which wouldn't be beneficial. Although they may sound great on paper, they won't work in real life. Not all ideas are implementable.

We also see in vv2 & 4, **Good Leaders Know Their Purpose & Focus** (vs. 2 & 4, ²*So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together & said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³Brothers & sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit & wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴and will give our attention to prayer & the ministry of the word."*)

The Disciples have a laser-focus on their calling - Prayer & Ministry of the Word. Or, teaching & training in righteousness, just like Moses in the past two weeks. They've been called, qualified & they know what God is & isn't calling them to spend their time doing. As leaders gain clarity of their purpose & calling, they have the ability to discern what to say no to, recognizing that, to deny God's calling on their life for an immediate need 'wouldn't be right'. Meaning it wouldn't benefit the whole, nor the vision & purpose.

In the early years of our church I did a great deal on Sunday mornings in preparation for the service. I remember Lindley, our first Admin Assistant, coming into her position saying, "I want to free you up to do what you're called to do." Since then we've had other Admin Assistants who've carried that mantle well. Abby Nixon did it for a while. Jordan now carries that weight well. I come into Sunday mornings now free to bring the message & focus on people. Recently Bill Massey has taken the weight of getting all our hospitality needs & printing done - what a blessing these things are, so I can be free to pursue what God's calling me to in my role!

The Disciples both give direction for the early church, and reaffirm their personal calling to devote themselves to prayer & the preaching of the Gospel. At times we need to reaffirm our purpose & calling in ministry, reminding ourselves & others concerning the unique gifts God's equipped us with, so we can focus without distraction. With each moment of transition, there comes tension as we identify new people to take on new roles - all very normal.

Next we see in vv3 & 5, **Good Churches Joyfully Nominate Servant Leaders under Biblical Direction** (vs. 3 & 5, ³*Brothers & sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit & wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴and will give our attention to prayer & the ministry of the word."* ⁵*This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith & of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.*)

The Disciples, knowing their ministry & calling, didn't feel threatened by adding deacons who handled things they couldn't. They highlighted the need & encouraged the church to bring forward men who could meet it. The church, under this godly, humble leadership, joyfully identified & nominated these deacons.

For a long time we've been discussing these needs at Six:Eight; struggling well with the need to augment our current structure to accommodate growth. The Holy Spirit's been directing us well, which is encouraging. We've listened, and are in process of structuring ourselves well, making things better by adding needed mechanisms for our church, just as they're doing in Acts!

Good leadership isn't intimidated by other strong leaders, it encourages them to step up & step out to advance the ministry of the church. When this happens, we see many different people, from different socioeconomic backgrounds & ethnicities, come together to serve the poor & marginalized well. Unity happens, leaders are raised up, the church is 'pleased' & God's Kingdom flourishes.

I've watched dying churches disregard these discussions. They become focused only on worship form, disregarding the much needed conversations & sometimes difficult decisions which need to be made to accommodate a growing church, or to even simply foster growth. It's sad to watch. Thankfully, I believe our leadership is listening to the Spirit well - we've had these conversations & are making decision towards our future!

Lastly we find in vv6 & 7, **Good Commissioning & Delegation Flourishes the Church & Multiplies Disciples** (vs. 6-7, ⁶ *They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed & laid their hands on them.* ⁷ *So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.*)

In order to be empowered for ministry & leadership the Disciples had to commission & bestow, on these nominated men, authority to do the work of ministering to these widows & marginalized. It was only when these people were nominated & then prayed over that the Scripture says *'the preaching about God FLOURISHED & disciples multiplied GREATLY'*.

Notice, stronger language is used here than in verse 1. God used these servant leaders to allow the Disciples to flourish in their preaching ministry & played a vital role in expanding the gospel in Jerusalem.

In a growing church, good leaders empower servant leaders. Good things happen even in the midst of chaos & disorganization. Good leaders know their purpose & focus. Good churches joyfully nominate servant leaders under biblical direction. And lastly, good commissioning & delegation flourishes the church & multiplies disciples.

When a church can grow through transitional times well, despite the perceived disorder or chaos, the result is, more & more people can know Jesus. In other words, we can fulfill our calling as the Body of Christ, as left to us in Matthew 28:18-20 by Jesus - "*All authority in heaven & on earth has been given to me.* ¹⁹ *Therefore go & make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit,* ²⁰ *and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*"

So, let's pray for our leadership, here & on the national level, that the Vineyard would grow well, reach out & assimilate more people into the ship of faith, and into the arms of Jesus!