

The Duties of a Deacon, 1

Acts 6:1-6

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, June 30, 2019

Turn with me to the book of Acts. And as you're turning there, I want to talk to you about something new today, something we've never looked at before, but it's the creation of a new office in our church. The creation of a new position and that is the position of deacon. I want to talk to you about the office of deacon. A church grows as its offices grow, right? That makes sense? You guys get that? It grows along with its leaders and with that in mind, this morning we're going to talk about a new position of leadership here at Grace Fellowship Church. The position of deacons. We just talked about the elders. That's something we did this past year. We worked on that for several months. If you're a visitor with us and you missed that, you can go online and listen to that in the book of Titus. But now, we want to talk about the deacons.

And just to get you thinking about this a little bit, the Bible tells us that there should be two offices in the church, or three, depending on how you look at it. The office of elder, the office of deacon and the office of deaconess. There's a little discrepancy as to whether there should be a deaconess position or not, and we're going to talk about that in a few weeks, so I won't get into that here. We'll spend an entire sermon on that. But you can make the case that there are two or three main offices in the church: elders, deacons and deaconesses.

Which is different from the Old Testament. If you think about it, it's very different from the way God did things with the Jews because they had more offices than that. They had way more offices. Every time you turn a page in the Old Testament, you come across another position of leadership in Israel.

Just to mention a couple of these, they had the office of priest, which led the people in worship. They led all the religious ceremonies in Israel. They made all the sacrifices. Then you had the office of prophet, who gave the Word of God to the people and corrected them. The prophets gave the Bible to Israel and rebuked them. Someone said to me the other day, "Don't you wish you were a prophet?" And I said, "No, because Israel stoned them. I like my job very much. Thank you very much." But that was another position in Israel, the prophets.

You had the scribes who wrote the Word of God down. They copied what the prophets said. Then you had the rabbis who taught it. They taught the people the word of the prophets. You had the Levites, who did everything in the temple. They took care of the festivities there. You had the judges, who protected Israel for a season. You had the kings, who led the people. You had the singers and musicians and poets. It just goes on and on. It's endless.

But in the New Testament, you only had three offices, three positions of leadership. The office of elder, the office of deacon, and the office of deaconess. 1 Peter 2:9 says, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession," which means that everyone can serve the Lord now in the church, everyone can worship Him the same way. We don't go through a priest; we are priests. We don't go through the chosen race to get to God; we are the chosen race, spiritually speaking. But even with that said, the church still needs

leadership. And so God gave us these offices for that purpose. And to help you see this for yourself, we're going to look at this in the book of Acts, and see this office in the first church in the Bible.

I mentioned this a moment ago, but if you're joining us for the first time today, we just finished up a series on the book of Titus called the "How to Plant a Church" series because that's what the book of Titus is about. It tells us how to plant a church, how to get it started and going. And now, we're going to look at the book of Acts because, for whatever reason, Titus did not mention the office of deacons. He didn't have that in his book. Titus talked about elders, he said a lot about them, but he left the deacons out.

But the book of Acts in chapter 6, if you want to turn to chapter 6 if you're not already there, tells us about the first deacons. You don't see the word "deacon" here, but I'll explain this in a minute. If you look in verses 1 through 6, it says,

Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, 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. 2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said to them, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas (I hope our first deacons have better names than this. These are hard to pronounce) and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

Just to give you some background for this passage, Acts is the history book of the early church. It tells us how the church itself got started and off the ground in the first century. Before the book of Acts, there were no churches. They didn't exist yet. They simply weren't there. But by the time the book is over, there are churches everywhere. If you remember, from one end of the Roman Empire to the other, it was full of churches. Which says that it grew quickly.

And just to walk you through some of this growth, if you want to follow along, maybe turning back to the first part of the book of Acts, in Acts 1, Jesus leaves the earth. He ascends into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. Then in Acts chapter 2, in His mercy, He sends the Holy Spirit down to live with us. Jesus went up to heaven, sends the Holy Spirit down. And one of the things the Spirit did immediately was to help the disciples preach in a way never seen before. He did a lot of things (the Spirit did) in the book of Acts. But the first thing He did was to help the disciples preach with tremendous effect.

In fact, in Acts 2:41, if you want to look there, it says that when Peter preached his first sermon (this is the first time anybody preached a sermon, a Christian sermon after Jesus) 3,000 were saved - first time. Let me just tell you, you have never heard a sermon like that, I'm guessing. I've never preached a sermon like that. 3,000 were saved in an instant. Then in Acts 4, Peter does it

again. He preaches his second sermon and this time, 5,000 were saved. If you look in Acts 4:4, it says, "Peter preached a sermon in which many of those who heard the message believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand." So this time, the author Luke is just numbering the men and it comes to 5,000. It doesn't include the women and children that were there. So, this could have been upwards of 10 or 15,000 people that were saved in the second sermon. So, the church goes from almost nobody, nothing, to thousands of people overnight through two sermons. That's a miracle. Amen? That's incredible. And what Acts goes on to say, is that with this tremendous growth came tremendous problems.

Everybody wants to grow but when you have that many people thrown on you at one time, you come across some issues. The first of which in Acts chapter 5, is sin. Do you remember the story of Ananias and Sapphira? They lie about some property they brought to the Lord. They said they gave away all of it - they didn't. And as a result (this is the first church discipline account in church history), they are killed. Everybody says they want to relive the book of Acts. Oh really? You know how many of us would be dead this morning? Right? But that was the first problem, we see in the book of Acts, with all this growth.

The second problem was the problem of service, which is in Acts chapter 6. You start off with the problem of sin, you get into the problem of service. Acts 6:1 again, says, "Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, 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."

We can't really relate to this today, but this was not an argument over a potluck. This was much more than that. When the early people were first saved, these Jews, if you look back for a moment in Acts 4:32 just to explain what's going on here ... got you guys turning a little bit back and forth here this morning ... to shed a little light on Acts chapter 6, Acts 4:32 says, "And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them." If you understand the context for this and what's going on in the book of Acts, as these Jews came to faith in Christ — Jews from all over the world (Acts 2 says, they were just from all places, thousands of them) — their families resented it. They hated them for it. And as a result, they tossed them out in the street. There've been stories of Jewish families at this time, maybe even holding funerals for their loved ones who came to Christ to say, "You're dead to me now. You don't exist anymore." Because of that, these people were destitute, thousands of them, all in an instant. And as a result of that, the early church stepped up and met their needs. They didn't become communists. That's not what this passage means when it says, "They shared all their goods." They just had compassion on the poor, and there were so many poor. That's what made Ananias and Sapphira's sin so disgusting, is that there's so many suffering people, there's so many hurting people, and they come in and lie about a gift just so they can get a pat on the back. So, there was a tremendous need. And the apostles in Acts 6, what they end up doing, is creating the office of deacon to oversee all of this.

You can just imagine if you had thousands of people bringing their possessions to the church, it would be an overwhelming thing to manage. Can you imagine that? It would take an incredible

amount of work. It would be too much for 12 guys, 12 apostles to handle. So, they created the office of deacon to help with that.

You don't see the word "deacon" in Acts chapter 6. That term is not used. But the word for deacons is *diákonos* in Greek, which simply means "servant" or "one who oversees the servants." And that's what you have here. These men oversaw the work of the servants. They oversaw everyone's gifts for the poor and the distribution of food. Which is what I want us to talk about this morning.

The story is told at the time Winston Churchill wanted to help England produce more coal during World War II, because if they didn't do that, they would run out of it. They would lose the war. So, Churchill told the nation to change their focus from the soldiers and fighter pilots and ship captains to the lonely, forgotten coal miners who were sweating it out in the belly of the earth. Churchill said, "Those are the men who will win the war for us. Those are the men who will bring glory to England." I think in this passage, what we're seeing here is that this is what the deacons do for the church. They sweat it out in the belly of the earth. They're lonely and forgotten and most people don't even know what they do, but they do this for the glory of God.

We'll talk about this in a moment, but a problem like this could have split the early church in half. Do you guys get that? I mean, people are starving, they're hungry, and there're issues with people complaining. That's how churches slip, right? That's how they just fall apart. So, the apostles chose men who were able to step into a problem like that and make it better. There are some men that, if they see a fire, they bring gasoline. They just blow it to pieces. There's other men who know how to bring water and put it out. These men could bring water to a fire. And so, this is an incredible position in the church, it's very important, and these men did a wonderful job with it. So, let's look at that this morning.

If you're taking notes on Acts chapter 6:1-6, I want you to see four characteristics of the first deacons in the church. That's our outline for today. It's pretty simple. But just so we can get our minds around this, I want you to see four characteristics of the first deacons in the church.

What is a deacon? What do they do? It's an unusual word: we don't have that word in English. So, what is the job description here? That's an important question, because if there's only a few offices in the church, you'd better get them right. If there's only a few positions of leadership, you've got to be sound on that. We could say it this way: most of the problems that destroy a church have nothing to do with spiritual things. They're physical like we just said. And so, you'd better choose men who can deal with those problems and sweat it out. And so, Acts chapter 6 talks about that, and let's look at this together.

Four characteristics of a deacon in the church - the first one is this, is there's a need for the deacons. That's where the chapter starts off with, the need for the deacons. God created this office for a reason because there was a need for it. There was a hole to fill in the church. We don't just put people in office so they can just have a wonderful title. We want them to do something, we want them to fill a void, and that's what these men did.

And I want to read this first verse to you again, Acts 6:1, is where we see this. It says, “Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, 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.” Just a few thoughts on this, but if you notice, verse 1 starts off with, “Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, while people were coming to faith in Christ, while these exciting things were happening in the church, a complaint arose.” The idea is that it's excitement, it's positive, it's good, and then there's this bad thing.

And if you read through the book of Acts, like we just did, you see how much the church increased so that by the time you get to chapter 4, there are thousands of Christians. This is a large number of people. And you can look at it this way, historians speculate that Jerusalem only had about half a million people in it at this time. It had about 500,000 people in it. I think that's the size of Chilliwack, Abbotsford and Surrey put together. And 10,000 people or more getting saved in a few months in a town like that would have created an uproar. It would have been a fury - sensational. And here in the midst of all of this, verse 1 says, a problem arises over the serving of food. They say the more people, the more problems, more centers, the more sin. That's what you see here.

And just to walk you through what this is all about, Hellenistic Jews is another way of saying Greek Jews or Jews that had adopted Greek culture. They spoke the Greek language, they wore Greek clothes, they did what the Gentiles do. They were Jewish by race, but everything else about them was like a Gentile. And native Hebrews is another way of saying traditional Jews; Jews that stuck to their Hebrew roots. Their clothes were Hebrew, their language was Hebrew, their names were Hebrew. Which means that this is not just about food, there's a social battle going on here. You see that? There's a clash of cultures, with one group saying, “I'm better than you because I dress this way and I talk this way.” And another group saying, “No, I'm better than you because I do it like this.” One group saying, “I'm closer to God, I'm more of a Christian than you are, so I deserve special treatment or at least my widows do.” And you're getting a rift in the church.

Widows were some of the poorest people in the ancient world, because all the good jobs went to men. So, if you were a widow and your husband died and you had no son to take care of you, you could be destitute. And so, this is a real sensitive issue here.

And I don't know if you know this, you probably do, but one of the hardest things to deal with in the church, is conflict, is people issues. Some people say, some ministers say and they joke about it, but the ministry would be great if it were not for the people. I don't think that's a good way to be. But you might want to say it would be great if it wasn't for the people's problems. It can be tough - people saying, “I'm better than you, I deserve special treatment,” those kinds of things.

It's also been said the church is like a family. And it's true because we fight like a family sometimes. We fight like angry children. An example of this, in 2012, a fight broke out at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem when an Ethiopian monk tried to move his chair into the Coptic side for shade on the rooftop. A fight broke out. Apparently, the monks had been arguing about this for centuries. They argued about which part of the rooftop belonged to who. And this particular monk was hot, so he moved his chair into the sun and a fight broke out.

Angry words were exchanged, then the two sides began pushing and hitting each other until 11 of them were injured, one was knocked unconscious and another broke his arm. As a matter of fact, today, I think if I still believe correctly, in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, fights between Christians are so bad that they have to get Muslims to lock the doors at night. The Christians can't even agree on who has the right to do that. But we do that sort of thing. We fight over stuff like that.

And just to think about all this stuff, stuff people fight over in the church, we fight over music, don't we? We fight over which instruments to play in worship. We fight over Bible translations. If you think about all the silly things to fight over, we fight over Bible translations. We go to war over that. Some people saying, "I have this translation, I'm godly" or "I have this translation, I am." We fight over the budget, we fight over the bulletin, we fight over the building, who gets to sit on which side? You guys are great about that. You never sit in the same pew every week - anyway, just kidding. I do it too. I sit right up here, so you can't see what my children are doing during the service.

But there's no end to the conflicts that arise, and especially if the church grows like you see here, the elders can't get to everything. They can't deal with all the problems that come up, and so it's the deacons' job to step in and help. Which means, here's an insight into this, the job of a deacon is not just physical. You see that here. I've been in churches where the deacons were basically the maintenance men for the building. That's not the only thing they do. They do that. Those kinds of things are a part of it. But they also step into things like this and help. Here, they had to help people work through a misunderstanding. They had to help people work through personal riffs and disagreements. They had to address a complaint. In fact, if you want to see the difference between the office of elder and the office of deacon, you can read on in verses 1 through 3 where it says,

1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, 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. 2 So 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. 3 Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation to put in charge of this task.

The 12 here in verse 2, you see the 12 summoned? That refers to the 12 apostles. The early leaders of the church, they functioned as elders at this time. And they said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables." That doesn't mean they were better than that. It doesn't mean they were above serving tables. It just means there wasn't enough time. Thousands of people, thousands of needs, there weren't enough hours in the day to teach the Word of God and help with issues like this. And so, they made a distinction between the offices. First Timothy 3:2 says that an elder has to be able to teach the Word of God. That's what he does. It's his job. You can't leave that out. James 5:14 says that elders are to pray. That's what they do as well. And the position of deacon was created to help them and free them up to do that. He says, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the Word of God in order to serve tables."

Because of this, one author called deacons the premier ministers of mercy in the church and the key servants, because that's what deacons do. They serve and they show mercy. Those are their specialties. If you're looking for a man to be a deacon, look for a merciful man. Look for a service-minded man. That's what you want. Another author called them the shock absorbers of the church because they do that as well. They absorb shocks that the elders can't get to.

I was talking to someone recently who wanted to go into the ministry. He wanted to be a deacon or maybe an elder someday. And so I said, "Do you like preaching?" And he said, "Yes, I do that. I do like that." I said, "Does anybody else like it when you preach?" - I'm just kidding, I didn't say that. It's an important question to ask. Just be gentle with it. I said, "That's good because elders do that. Elders preach and if you want to go that route, that's part of the job. Do you like to pray?" And he said, "Yes, I do like to pray." And I said, "That's good because that's part of what elders and deacons do." I said, "Do you like problems?" He kind of paused for a moment. I think I caught him off guard. I said, "Do you like to help people work through conflict and issues and hard things?" And I said, "Because that's what both of them do." Elders, deacons, whatever you do in ministry, that's a huge part of the task. And so, what we see here is that as the deacons are being put in place, the congregation is told to look for men who already know how to do that. They know how to step into a problem and help. One way to look at problems is, if there were no problems, there would be no ministry. In heaven, I won't have a job. In heaven, deacons and elders, they may be honoured in some ways, but they won't be helping people work through problems because there'll be no sin. But while we're here on this earth, we need men to help us with that.

Which leads us to the next point in the book of Acts, a second characteristic for a deacon in the church. The first one is the need for the deacons - the deacons met a need in the church. They filled a hole of service. The elders couldn't get to everything, so these men helped them out, bringing us to a second characteristic of a deacon, and that is the qualification of the deacons. First, we see the need for these guys. Second, we see the qualifications of the deacons, which I won't say a whole lot about because we're going to talk about that next week. But we see the kind of men they should be. And if you read on in verses 2 through 3, here's where you see their qualifications. It says,

2 So 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. 3 Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

If you noticed, there are three qualifications that are mentioned here in the selection of a deacon. The book of First Timothy gives us more and we'll talk about that next time. But there are three traits here. We can look at these quickly.

The first is that they should be men of good reputation. Verse 3 says, "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation." That means they have a good name, good standing in the community. They're not going to bring shame on the church if you select these men. They're not going to embarrass you later. You know that they're men of high quality.

Second, it says they should be full of the Spirit. Which is another way of saying they live a godly life. You don't want a godless deacon, you want a godly one. One who is known for walking with the Lord.

And third, it says they should be men of wisdom, which is important because due to the nature of this task, they're going to need wisdom. Everything is not black and white. Everything doesn't have a simple answer. Every problem is not fixed in a moment. Some things take a lot of care and discernment and you want men who are able to handle things that way.

And the point here is the apostles didn't choose just anybody for this office. They didn't draw straws and say, "You, you and you, go be a deacon." They chose men who were qualified and who were ready for this office. And we'll talk about this more next time.

But I want to quickly move on to the third characteristic of a deacon, and that is the appointment of the deacons. So, we see the need for these guys in Acts chapter 6. There was a hole to fill. We see the qualifications of them. There're three mentioned here, there're many more mentioned in First Timothy. Verse 3 says, "They are to be of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom. That's the kind of guys you're to look for." Third, it brings us to the appointment of a deacon. Once the congregation saw this in these men, once it saw that they were qualified, the book of Acts said that they appointed them to office, they installed them. We're having an elder installation service in a couple of weeks. We're doing that because that's a Biblical precedent. And we see this here with the deacons in verses 3 through 6. It says,

3 Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip (and all those guys with hard names I have a hard time pronouncing)...And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid hands on them.

Just to walk you through this appointment process, to point out a few things here, if you notice, verse 3 says, the apostles told them, "Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation." We don't know why they chose seven men. That's not really revealed to us. It could be that that's the number of men they needed. It could be the number of men they had. But the word select is the Greek word *episkeptomai*, which means "to inspect" or "to pick out from among you."

The King James Version says "to look for," which is a good translation of this. The apostles told the people to look for men who do this on a regular basis. "As you're going about your daily business, as you're going about the normal task in the church, look for men like this. Don't look for guys who only do this at Easter and Christmas. That's no good. Don't look for guys who only do this when everyone's watching them. Look for men who are like this all the time. You shouldn't look for men who might be qualified someday, you look for men who are qualified now." Do you guys remember when David Beakley was with us a couple of weeks ago, he said that when you're choosing men for missions, when you're choosing men for the ministry, you

should look for people who are already ministering in the church. You shouldn't look for people who might minister someday. David Beakley was in South Africa. He says, don't send someone to Africa thinking they're going to do something there that they're not doing in Chilliwack. You look and see what they're doing here in Chilliwack, and that's how you make your choice. It's what the early church did. They looked for men who were serving and they made them servants. One of my professors said they looked for men who were "deaking" and they made them deacons. He said he had a deacon come up to him one day and he said, "Hey pastor, I just became a deacon. What am I supposed to do?" He said, "Well, you're a deacon. Go 'deak.' Off, go." Kind of simplistic, but you get the point.

The passage also says in verse 5 that "the statement found approval with the whole congregation". That was part of the appointment process. It means the people were united in this decision. They were in agreement. The church already had a potential split, it already had a potential rift. You don't want to pick guys that are going to increase the rift. You want to pick guys who everyone is united over. And verse 6 says that after praying over them, they laid hands on them.

That's the first time in verse 6 that anyone lays hands on someone in the church. It's the first time you saw that happening. That was a Jewish tradition which showed that you approve someone for ministry. You were behind them. The Jews used to anoint their head with oil. I would like to do that next Sunday night. I think that would be a lot of fun. But they would also lay hands on them. That was part of the process. It didn't give them magic powers. That wasn't the point. It was just their way of saying, "We support you publicly."

And I might need to mention, there's a lot of things that are left out in Acts chapter 6. We don't know how all this played out in the church. For instance, we don't know if these deacons represented the entire church in Jerusalem or not. It looks like they did, but Acts 2:46 says the Church met from house to house at this point in time. So, it was a house church movement. And we don't know if these guys represented all the houses where the church was.

We also don't know how they were selected by the congregation - if the people voted or not. The Jews normally didn't do that. They were not a democratic society. They would normally elect the head of a household to make decisions for them, maybe to make a vote for them. It could have been what they did here. But what we do know is that they looked for men who are already qualified. They looked for men who were already doing the work, which is what we want to do in our church.

I served at a church some time ago that understood this pretty well. They had a great appointment process for the deacons because they would watch you in ministry. They would see what you did on a regular basis and if they saw these qualities in you, they would simply send you a letter that said, "Congratulations, you're a deacon." You go, "Oh, okay." They said, "We've been watching you in ministry, we've seen what you do for the Lord, and we want to acknowledge it by making you a deacon. You don't have to sit on any committees." Which made me very happy. "You don't have to do anything different. Just keep doing what you're doing. We just want to acknowledge your ministry to the people." See, in other churches, they have a more formal process, which is fine as well. Where here, they met with you one-on-one and had a

discussion as to all the office entailed. But either way, the passage says to “select men from among you”. Look out for men who fit this description and put them in office.

At one point in his ministry to Africa, the great missionary, David Livingstone was making a request for the help to the churches in England. He said he needed more men, and the church wrote back saying, “We will send you more men if you just clear a path for us to get there. If you just show us the road.” To which David Livingstone replied, “This is Africa. I only need men who are willing to go where there are no roads.” I think the office of deacon is like that. In a sense, we only need men who are willing to go where there are no roads. We need men who are willing to go where there are no clear paths. They’re willing to do anything. The best deacons I’ve seen, I love seeing those guys because you never know what they’re going to be doing. One minute they’re sitting on a lawn mower, the next minute they’re on top of someone’s house fixing the roof. Next minute, they’re weeping and praying with someone in the pew. Those guys are versatile. That’s the way this office is. The point is that you serve, whatever it takes. The point is that you help people with their needs. You show them mercy, whatever that mercy looks like.

To say it another way, the apostles told the church, “You will know a deacon when you see one.” It’s as simple as that. You’ll know a servant when you see them serve. And when you see that, approve them, appoint them and put them in office. Which leads to one more point Paul makes here, and this is the last one in the list. And I appreciate your guys’ patience going through this passage. This is important for the life of the church and this is something we’re putting on our minds for our future decisions for men in this office.

But one more characteristic of a deacon in the church, and that is the high calling of a deacon. We’ve seen the need for the deacons, God created this office to meet a need. We have seen the qualifications for these men and also the appointment process for them. But fourth and finally, I want you to see the high calling of a deacon. You might think that a guy who sits on a lawn mower, who climbs on someone’s roof or waits tables has a low calling, right? After all, the title *diákonos* means “servant.” That sounds low. It sounds like a pretty humble, modest thing to do, but actually, the book of Acts says, deacons have a high calling in the church. They have a very high responsibility with the Lord. And you see this with the first men who are named as deacons in the church. You see this with these first guys. Verse 5 says, “The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid hands on them.”

Just to show you who some of these men are, the first one is Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit. The next chapter, Acts chapter 7, tells us that Stephen was the first martyr of the early church. You guys remember that story? He was the first one to die for the faith, which means (and this is an honour) that before any apostle died for the faith, a deacon did. Isn’t that neat? Before an elder shed blood for Christ, a lowly servant had that honour. If you want to hear a great sermon, read Acts chapter 7 and see the boldness of the man, Stephen.

Then we come to a guy in Acts 6:5 named Philip. Philip was the first Gentile evangelist in the church. It doesn’t say this here, but Acts chapter 8 says he was the first one to bring the Gospel to the non-Jews. Acts 8:5 says he evangelized to the Samaritans. And no one told him to. It’s not

like he had a *Fundamentals of the Faith* book that showed him how to do that. He just went and shared Christ with the Samaritans. We hear that, don't think much about it, but you have to understand what this is saying. Samaritans were not Jewish, they were part Jew and part Gentile, so they were considered aliens and dirty people. So again, before any apostle goes to the Gentiles, a deacon does that. Before any of the elders shared Christ with a non-Jew, the lowly servant had that honour as well. Later in chapter 8, Philip evangelizes an Ethiopian eunuch, who was doubly despised. He was an Ethiopian and a eunuch, someone the Jews would have hated that. And the point is, God is giving a high calling to the deacons. You see that right here. He's giving them a very vital role to play in the church. They come alongside the elders and help them, they work as peace servants and premier ministers of mercy and shock absorbers in the church. But they do it standing on the shoulders of giants.

If you have an aspiration for the office of deacon, praise the Lord, we're so glad for that. But I want to encourage you to read over these names and see the high calling that you're aspiring to. These men were the cream of the crop. They held nothing back from Christ. And we want to see men who do the same thing in our church.

The British pastor, Robert Chapman used to host missionaries who were visiting him on Furlough. And when he did, one of the things he would do for them is he would clean their boots while they slept. He would ask them to leave their boots outside the door at night. And while they were asleep, he would polish them and rub them off. And someone asked him once, "Pastor Chapman, why do you do that? That's such a lowly task?" To which he said this, he said, "Jesus did it for me and therefore, it is a high calling." He said, "The Lord served me this way. He washed my feet and the least I can do is wash their boots." May we all say that this morning, whether you aspire to the office of deacon or not. It is a high calling to serve in the church. Amen? It is a privilege to do all of this. Where would we be without the choice servants of God in Grace Fellowship? Where would you be if someone didn't come alongside you and show mercy and meet your needs? And now, it's a privilege to go out and do that for others. And we're going to talk about this more in the weeks to come in this particular office. This sermon was just to kind of lay a foundation for what we're going to talk about in the next two weeks.

But let me pray for us now as we consider all of these things, as we look forward to installing this office in the future and as we serve the Lord.

Father, we thank you for what You've shown us in Your Word, about the high calling of the deacons. Lord, we thank you for the book of Acts and what it tells us about Your church. Just how things were so supernatural in this book and sometimes, so common. We see problems here just like we see in the book of Acts, just like we see problems in our church. And yet, we know You're the God who solves problems. You're the God who loves sinners, and You're the God who creates offices like this one to help us in that.

Lord, would You give us grace and mercy as we consider deacons in the future. Would You be glorified as we talk about service and how to serve one another.

Lord, thank you for Grace Fellowship, for what You've done so far in the life of our church, how far You've enabled us to come. You have been merciful and gracious. And Lord, we just pray for

that grace to continue, that Christ would get all the glory. And we pray this in Jesus' name, amen.