

Finding a solution Acts 6:1-7

[A businessman](#) walks into a Swiss bank in Geneva and asks for a \$100 loan. He offers his luxury Mercedes car as collateral. The collateral is too good, and the bank manager approves the loan. A year later, the businessman comes back. He repays the loan and the 10% interest and is ready to collect his car. Finally, the puzzled bank manager dares to ask him: "Excuse me, sir, could you tell me: did you really need that \$100 so badly? In order to get the money, you left your luxury car with us for a whole year!" The businessman replied, "That's simple – just [think outside the box](#) : where else in Geneva can I find such a great parking place for just \$10 a year while I travel?"

Today's account from Acts 6 is about finding a solution to a pressing problem. When we come to chapter 6, we find a different kind of threat to the preaching of the gospel. It is not another instance of persecution, nor another prohibition from the Sanhedrin; it is a crisis within the church, which could distract the apostles from their primary mission. Let us see how this crisis is dealt with, and what lessons there may be here for us.

As we have seen from earlier statements in Acts, the church continued to grow, in spite of opposition and persecution. Here, I believe that Luke calls our attention to the growth of the church because it was part of the problem the apostles must deal with. Church growth was a factor in the friction that was surfacing in the church due to discrepancies in the care of its widows. Growth has its benefits, but it also has its pitfalls.

In order to understand the problem that had arisen in the growing church in Jerusalem, we must be aware of the differences between "Greek-speaking Jews" and "native Hebraic Jews" (Acts 6:1). A "native Hebraic Jew" was most likely born and raised in Israel "Greek-speaking Jews" were most likely born and raised in one of the Greek-speaking countries outside of Israel.

It was not just a matter of the place of one's birth, but of one's native language. "Native Hebraic Jews" would have spoken Aramaic (closely related to Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament). "Greek-speaking Jews" would have spoken Greek and also the native tongue of their country. These would be the languages in which those gathered at Pentecost heard the praises of God:

5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven residing in Jerusalem. 6 When this sound occurred, a crowd gathered and was in confusion, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. 7 Completely baffled, they said, "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that each one of us hears them in our own native language? 9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and the province of Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – we hear them speaking in our own languages about the great deeds God has done!" (Acts 2:5-11)

The apostles (and perhaps others) who spoke in tongues were Galileans, and thus they were "native Hebraic Jews." Those who had come from various distant locations were "Greek-speaking Jews." The miracle at Pentecost was that those who were "Greek-speaking Jews" heard "native Hebraic Jews" speaking the praises of God in their own native language – not Greek, but the native tongue of their place of birth.

Beyond one's place of birth and language, there were other distinctions between these two groups. Most notably, there would be significant cultural differences. They did things differently. No wonder that there were many synagogues in Jerusalem (as we will shortly see in Acts 6:9). These Hellenistic Jews met for teaching and fellowship in synagogues with people of the same place of birth, language, and culture.

The "native Hebraic Jews" may very well have been in the majority. If now, they at least had many advantages over the others. This was their turf. They were the ones who could, and would, speak with greater authority. No doubt, they tended to look down on those "late comers" who could not even speak Aramaic.

The growth of the church was one reason why the number of widows the church cared for was large. But there was another reason. Many "foreign" (i.e. "Hellenistic") Jews felt that the end times were near, and thus they wanted to spend their last days in or near Jerusalem. This was the place where it would all come to a head. And so many widows seem to have spent most of their resources getting to Jerusalem. They may very well have left their families behind, which means their source of support was left behind. With such a growing population (it wasn't just widows who wanted to relocate to Jerusalem), property in Jerusalem was scarce, and prices were undoubtedly high. The widows may have been forced to find housing outside of Jerusalem proper, perhaps in some of the "suburbs."

While we are not told the ways in which the Greek-speaking widows were overlooked, it is not difficult to imagine some possibilities. There could have been geographic issues, like distance from Jerusalem proper. Perhaps the feeding tables were set up in Jerusalem proper, but many of the Greek-speaking widows lived too far away (and there were no “Meals on Wheels” available). Perhaps language played a part. What if the announcements as to where and when feedings would occur were written in Aramaic? The Greek-speaking widows would be left in the dark as to where to eat.

The discrepancy in the care of the widows does not seem to be intentional on the part of the native-Hebraic saints. The disaster with Hurricane Katrina provides us with an illustration. If I understand it correctly, it seems that shortly after the hurricane struck, the only way for people to apply for help was on-line. Now, how could someone whose home was destroyed apply on-line? The poor would not have had a computer in the first place, and they surely would not know how to use one. Help was available, but it was not equally available to all. Some inadvertently (it would appear) were given preference over others. And there was complaining as a result. No wonder.

There was grumbling going on in the church at Jerusalem, and the apostles learned of it. The grumbings were not the grumbings of the Greek-speaking widows; they were the grumbings of the Greek-speaking saints, who took up the cause of their widows. The grumbings were not against the apostles, but against the native-Hebraic Jews, whose widows were faring far better.

Understand the Problem

The first step is to understand the problem from every side and angle. It is important to find out what the problem seems to be and what it may actually be. It is important that you do not have tunnel vision and do not see all sides clearly.

It is important to listen to all sides and understand the underlying differences that arise from culture, place, birth and language.

In our first visit to India, Liz reflected upon the story in Matthew of the unforgiving servant and

how many times she we forgive. As she shared and as we looked at the pastors, I knew we were in trouble.

Firstly, our translation of the bible was different to the Telegu. Secondly our understanding of 70x7 was different. Thirdly we unknowingly came across a different understanding of forgiveness that was culturally found where there was a limit to how many times that you should forgive.

Fortunately we were able to sort it out and one pastor was significantly helped by Liz's presentation.

We also found that Indians were different to Australians in many other ways. We had to put on our cultural glasses not just Indian but Australian ones, ask a few questions and note how to manage it.

Understand the Process

We are not given a report of the entire process, but only of its conclusion. However when the church faced another problem, namely the work amongst the gentiles that did not require them to become Jews first, they met together, they prayed and sought the Holy Spirit's guidance.

The Holy Spirit was the driving force of the early church and the work of God. Previously we read that they devoted themselves to prayer cf Acts 2:42 and when Peter and John returned from the Sanhedrin, they went straight to prayer: Acts 4:24)

The process was simple. Come together and pray and seek the Holy Spirit's wisdom and guidance.

Whatever problem you face take it together to the Lord in prayer. If you are single person, find another Christian that you trust to pray with and seek the Lord about the problem. If you are a

couple, pray together and seek the Lord for the solution. If you are a church council you are to come together, pray and seek the Lord about the solution.

The challenge is to come together, seek the Lord in prayer and get onto God's page about the solution. This is what the apostles did and this is what we should do. Sometimes the solution is different to what we expect.

A tale is told about a small town that had historically been "dry," but then a local businessman decided to build a tavern. A group of Christians from a local church were concerned and planned an all-night prayer meeting to ask God to intervene. It just so happened that shortly thereafter lightning struck the bar and it burned to the ground. The owner of the bar sued the church, claiming that the prayers of the congregation were responsible, but the church hired a lawyer to argue in court that they were not responsible. The presiding judge, after his initial review of the case, stated that "no matter how this case comes out, one thing is clear. The tavern owner believes in prayer and the Christians do not."

Understand the Priorities

The apostles called the believers together to announce the solution they had reached. They first set aside any expectation that the twelve should neglect the teaching of the Word in order to personally correct the neglect of the widows. It would be wrong for them to allow this problem to redirect their priorities. The apostles could, however, correct this inequity by delegation. And so they laid down the requirements for those to whom this task would be given. The men of the church should select seven men, who will oversee "this necessary task."

The church had grown and so had the needs of the people. It became clear that the apostles could not physically do everything. Something had to give.

What was their primary task? What did God want them to do? It became apparent that they were called to pray and teach. The distribution of food and helping people would be needed to be done by others.

In the ministry that God has given, what are God's priorities for us to do? What is important or are we controlled by the urgent? This is the challenge for all Christians whatever they are called to do to serve God in the world.

But do not be deceived? So often people get caught up in the work of ministry so much that it dominates and takes over their life. They think that they are doing the Lord's work but they forget that their marriage and their children are also part of the Lord's work as well.

I am not just talking about mission and ministry. I am also talking to those who work hard in their job in the world but they have become workaholics and have no balance in their life. It is just work, work, work! They come home tired and have no space and energy for spouse and family.

Last Saturday we went to the playground for my grandson's second birthday. I saw dads there with their children but Dad was on his phone while the children were yelling out for Dad's attention.

What are God's priorities for you? They do include spouse, children, grandchildren as well as the work of ministry.

Understand the Personnel

The apostles do specify that these seven men must be highly qualified. They must have a good reputation, and they must be "full of the Spirit and of wisdom." The apostles do not specify that these men must be Greek-speaking Jews, and yet the names of all seven are Greek names. One of these men – Nicolas – was a proselyte, a Gentile who had converted to Judaism. The church seemed to recognize that these Greek-speaking widows would best be represented and cared for by Greek-speaking men.

The apostles handed the responsibility of choosing the people to the brothers. All they asked for is that they would be men full of the Spirit and wisdom.

The brothers chose well and we see Luke introducing Stephen and Philip as they will have a significant part to play in the God's story of the early church. But do not underestimate the other five who were chosen. Their story may not be specifically recorded but their fruit has been.

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.

Note that there were about 8000 priests at the time of Jesus who served the temple. However they were only gainfully employed about two months of the year and had to find work to sustain themselves. They were a poor and socially depressed class and many would have been open to the gospel.

Choosing the right personnel for the ministry is very important. Choosing the right person for any job is important. Sometimes we can be blind to who is right in front of us.

Peter asked the believers to choose men who were full of the Holy Spirit and Wisdom. The basis of their choice was to be a person who is fully devoted to God and led by the Holy Spirit. Not on age or education or popularity.

Remember the way that God chooses people is based on what is inside the person and their openness to be moulded by Him. Many all felt insignificant and thought there were others better than themselves but God's choice proved to be right. Some were old, some were young, many had issues in their past but God saw their potential and not their problems.

Dwight L Moody was a poorly educated, unordained shoe salesman who felt God's call to preach the gospel. He was an ordinary person who sought to be fully and wholly consecrated to Christ. Through this one common life God began to do the extraordinary. Moody became one of the greatest evangelists of modern times. He preached in revival services across Britain and America, where thousands and thousands came to Christ.

God has a solution to the challenges that you face. As you seek Him, pray to Him, he will have the right person to help you solve the problem that you face.

Knowing My God, the solution will not come from an obvious direction but it will come as you stay close to Him.

God has a solution to every problem you face. Amen.