

7 - BATTLE PLANS

Acts 6:1-7

Next week we are beginning a brand new series called, "Finding your way back to God." All of us have longings I believe God created us to have. We long to have love, purpose and meaning in our life. But over time, it becomes clear the only way these longings will be satisfied is through a relationship with God.

So regardless of where you are on your journey, whether you believe in God and have jumped all in with Him, or maybe you're still testing the water, trying to recover from a bad hurt you've experienced, this next series is going to be for you. We're going to look at those moments we wake up and find true love, purpose and meaning in life. So I hope you'll join us the next few weeks here at Restoration as we find our way back to God.

Today we wrap up our time studying the book of Acts. Acts is one of my favorite books to read and study because it feels so action packed. Acts is not just talking about what we need to think and believe, it shows us what we do because of what we believe. I have been personally encouraged and challenged by our time reading the book of Acts. I'm praying God will use this series to launch our church onto another level.

As we've worked our way through the first 5 chapters, we've seen an exciting beginning to the church in Jerusalem. 3,000 people being baptized on the opening day, then huge growth as the church was devoted to the Word, fellowship, worship and prayer.

Of course, this brought about it's own share of problems. Anytime you follow Jesus you can expect opposition. This group was no exception. Last week we even saw the apostles put in jail and flogged as an encouragement for them to stop talking about Jesus.

But that threat and pain did not work. They kept on preaching boldly and the church grew.

By the time we get to Acts chapter 6, the church is very large. It's numbering in the thousands, tens of thousands. Acts 4 told us there were 5,000 men (not counting women and children). This is a huge movement taking place in the city of Jerusalem. Every day people were being added to the church. They were gathering for worship together.

As we've seen previously, people would bring offerings into the church so the money could be divided up between those who were in need. With so many people from around the world becoming Christians, they did not have a job or any means to provide for themselves while they stayed in Jerusalem learning about this new life we have in Christ. So these offerings were put to good use by caring for the church.

But with such a large group, there were bound to be some logistic issues that developed. And that brings us to chapter 6 verse 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.

Hellenistic Jews were Jews who had adopted the Greek language and culture. These were the ones who came to Jerusalem to celebrate the day of Pentecost and stayed because they believed in Jesus.

So there is a problem in the church. Some of the widows were being overlooked when it came time to receive their food from the food pantry. You can imagine in a church of this many people, it would be easy to have some problems like this. So there was a complaint.

Did you hear about the little old lady who went into the department store... and as she entered, she was startled when a band began to play and a dignified executive pinned gave her flowers and handed her a crisp hundred dollar bill. She was the store's millionth customer. Television cameras were focused on her and reporters began interviewing. "Tell me," one asked, "just what did you come here for today?" The lady hesitated for a minute, then answered, "I'm on my way to the Complaint Department."

People in Jerusalem made their way to the church complaint department.

Notice how the church leaders respond to the complaint. Verse 2...

2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and 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 and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

When the complaint was brought up to the apostles, they didn't ignore it, they didn't lash out, they simply made sure their priorities were in the right order and organized the church to meet the need.

Their priorities were teaching the Word of God. They had all of these new believers who needed to be instructed on what it looks like to follow Jesus. This doesn't mean that waiting on tables was beneath them? Of course, not. That was not the problem. They were willing to serve in any form they could. After all, they had learned service from Jesus.

Jesus said in Matthew 20:26-28, "[Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.](#)"

Jesus could have come to this world demanding everything from people, but He didn't do that. Jesus was a servant. He healed people, blessed children, made wine at a wedding feast, raised the dead, and washed the feet of the disciples. He did all those things and more.

But He also preached and taught the message of God! And that was the most important aspect of His life. He wanted to bring people to a saving relationship to God.

Likewise, the apostles were not too proud to serve others, to wait on tables, or take food to widows in the church. But they were primarily in the church to preach and teach the people about Jesus.

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said in verse 3...

2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and 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 and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

Basically, "We need to fix this problem. Here's what we should do." Choose 7 guys who are qualified and would do a good job with this ministry and we will let them run it. As for us, we keep our top priorities as prayer and teaching God's Word.

Notice how the church responded. Verse 5...

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

Everyone loves the idea! They choose 7 men to lead the food pantry and the apostles approve their decision by laying hands on them.

Laying hands on people is a traditional way to affirm a person's calling for a particular ministry. It shows the church leadership believes God has gifted this person for this ministry. It's a way for the church to communicate they are with them and supporting them.

So when the church kept the priorities in order with how God gifted them to serve, there is a positive result. Verse 7...

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.

All because people kept the priorities in the proper order and allowed others to serve using their God given gifts.

As Restoration grows, we need to make sure we put the right people in the right places so the ministry of the church can expand and people will be impacted for Christ. And the good news is God has already gifted you for ministry.

That's right, you are a minister!

Here's the definition we believe ministry is at Restoration:

"Ministry is using whatever God has given me to serve him and the needs of others."

So when I talk about finding your ministry, I'm asking you to ask what has God given me? That's where it starts. What has God given to me, because what He's given me He expects me to use in serving Him and the needs of others.

Think about this... Even before you were born, God knew that on this day you'd be sitting here in this theater, listening to this text from Acts 6 about serving in the church. Isn't that incredible?! God knows every day of your life before you were even born.

And how God made you to be determines the ministry or function you're should have in the church.

We have an acrostic that we're going to use very quickly to help us understand where we should serve in the church. The acrostic is SHAPE. We will go over it very quickly today, and later on we will cover this more in depth.

MY SHAPE WILL DETERMINE MY MINISTRY..

What is my SHAPE? There are five factors that influence who you are. What are the things that shaped me? Five things...

S - SPIRITUAL GIFTS

1 Corinthians 7:7 Paul writes, "[I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.](#)"

Paul is saying no one has all the gifts. You may think so, but you don't.

H - HEART

The question you want to ask here is, "What do I love to do?"

Isn't it true there are some things you love to do and there's just some things you hate to do?

That's your heart. Where did you get that natural inclination? God put it in you. God wants your ministry to be a blessing, not a burden. So it's a legitimate question to ask yourself, "What do I love to do?" Why would God give you a ministry that He hasn't given you a heart for? When you look at your gifts and your heart, what do you like to do?

One of the things I've discovered after being in the ministry for a number of years is that people rarely succeed unless they're having fun doing it. Unless they're enjoying it.

What am I gifted to do? What do I love to do?

A - ABILITIES

Natural talents are different from spiritual gifts. God has given people abilities to perform various functions. So a question to ask yourself here is what natural talents have I been given by God?

P - PERSONALITY

We're all very different. We've all got different personalities, different blends of temperament. So we're going to ask ourselves, "Where does my personality best suit me to serve?"

If you are an introverted person I'd suggest you not get involved in the Greeters Ministry. That's going to put a lot of additional stress on your life.

When you have an area that you may be gifted to do and a heart to do, but you don't have personality to do, it puts enormous stress on your life. God doesn't want you to have to do that.

E - EXPERIENCES

Your experiences help determine the direction you should be involved in ministry. There are four different kinds of experiences you want to look at when you're trying to discover your shape.

1. What spiritual experiences have I had?

This means times with the Lord. Maybe at a retreat or campground or at home, maybe as a young person, maybe a crisis you went through and that brought you closer to the Lord. Your experiences are going to have an influence. The amount of time you've been a Christian is going to influence what ministry you should be involved in.

2. What painful experiences have I had?

Many people overlook this but it's very, very important. Your painful experiences often determine your ministry.

2 Corinthians 1:4 "3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

God allows you to go through a painful experience and then heals you and comforts you in that experience so that He will give you the ministry of helping other people in that very same thing.

Who can relate to somebody who's struggling with alcoholism better than somebody who's been an alcoholic?

Who can better relate to somebody who's lost a child in miscarriage or stillbirth than somebody who's had a miscarriage or stillbirth?

God never wastes a painful experience. Even the painful experiences we bring on ourselves through dumb decisions and mistakes God wants to use in ministry.

3. What educational experiences have I had?

What have you learned? If you've learned certain skills like computers or carpentry, maybe God wants to use that.

4. What ministry experiences have I had?

What experiences have I already had? What opportunities have I already had? For some of you this will be a lot. For some of you this will be minimal. Some of you none at all.

I believe your ministry will be most effective and fulfilling when you are using your Gifts and Abilities in the area of Heart's Desire in a way that best expresses your Personality and Experience.

And always remember...

SUCCESS IS DOING WHAT GOD MADE ME TO DO!

Isn't that what the church in Jerusalem experienced?

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.

The story of Carol Thatcher...

You'll never be truly successful until you are serving God in the way He designed you to serve.

COMMUNION

(Video after prayer)