

In Acts chapter 6 we see a growing church face a very real, very human problem—and we also see how the Spirit of God uses that problem to raise up new servants and advance the gospel. Then the focus narrows to Stephen, a man so full of grace and power that his enemies cannot answer him and instead resort to lies. This passage speaks both to the way we serve inside the church and to the courage we need when we stand for Jesus in a hostile world.

1. A growing church and a real problem (Acts 6:1–4)

Luke tells us:

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. (Acts 6:1)

The church in Jerusalem is multiplying. But growth brings complexity. “Hellenists” were Greek-speaking Jews, often from outside Israel, while “Hebrews” were Aramaic-speaking Jews native to the land. Both groups believed in Jesus, but they came from slightly different cultural backgrounds.

The complaint is simple and serious: the Greek-speaking widows are being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. This is not just about food; it is about fairness, love, and unity. The church is caring for widows, which is good and godly, but some are being unintentionally neglected.

Instead of ignoring the problem or brushing it off as “just a complaint,” the apostles face it openly:

Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:2–4)

They are not saying that serving tables is beneath them. They are saying that their primary calling is to prayer and the ministry of the word, and if they try to carry all the practical burdens themselves, the word of God will be neglected. The answer is not for the leaders to do everything; the answer is for the body to function as a body.

So they ask the congregation to choose seven men with three qualities:

1. Good reputation – trusted, dependable, known for integrity.
2. Full of the Holy Spirit – not just talented, but spiritually alive and led by God.
3. Full of wisdom – practical, careful, sound judgment in handling people and resources.

Practical application for believers:

Complaints in church life are not always a sign of rebellion; sometimes they are signals that we need to listen, adjust, and involve more people in ministry. When problems arise:

- Do you immediately take sides, or do you ask how God might want to use the problem to grow the church?
- Are you willing to serve in quiet, practical ways so that others can focus on their calling?
- Do you care as much about the overlooked and vulnerable as God does?

This passage pushes us to examine our own hearts: Am I a consumer in the church, or a servant? If the apostles looked out over your fellowship today, could you be chosen as one “of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom”?

2. Seven chosen to serve (Acts 6:5–7)

The church responds well:

And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. (Acts 6:5)

Stephen is singled out as “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit.” Philip will later become a powerful evangelist. The others are not described in detail, but their names are largely Greek, suggesting that the congregation wisely chose men from the very group feeling neglected. This is a beautiful picture of healing and trust.

Whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. (Acts 6:6)

The apostles pray and lay hands on them, recognizing and affirming their ministry. This is not a small, “lesser” role. It is a Spirit-filled calling to care for God’s people.

The result:

Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:7)

When the church deals with conflict wisely, protects the priority of prayer and the word, and releases Spirit-filled servants into their callings, the word of God spreads, disciples multiply, and even some of the Jewish priests come to faith in Jesus.

Challenge for believers:

Ask yourself:

- Am I willing to step into humble, practical service if it will help the word of God spread?
- Do I see “behind-the-scenes” ministry as truly spiritual if it is done in the power of the Holy Spirit?

- Do I pray for my church's leaders, that they would not be pulled away from prayer and the ministry of the word?

The early church was not built on a handful of celebrities; it was built on many Spirit-filled servants. God still calls ordinary believers—men and women, young and old—to serve Him in ways that keep the church healthy and the gospel moving outward.

3. Stephen's character and conflict (Acts 6:8–10)

Luke now narrows the lens to Stephen:

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. (Acts 6:8)

Stephen was chosen to oversee food distribution, but he does much more than logistics. He is full of faith and power. God works through him in miraculous ways. Being faithful in “serving tables” did not limit him; it positioned him to be greatly used by God.

Opposition soon arises:

Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. (Acts 6:9–10)

These men argue with Stephen, but they cannot stand against the wisdom and the Spirit speaking through him. Stephen is not relying on clever argument alone; he is speaking in step with the Spirit of God.

Application for believers:

Where has God placed you to serve? You may feel your role is simple and unnoticed, but if you are full of faith and the Holy Spirit, God can use you powerfully wherever you are. Ask the Lord to fill you with His Spirit, to saturate you with His word, and to give you wisdom when you speak. You may not work public miracles, but your life and words can bear powerful witness in your home, workplace, and community.

4. False accusations and a radiant face (Acts 6:11–15)

Unable to win by honest debate, Stephen's opponents resort to deception:

Then they secretly induced men to say, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. (Acts 6:11–12)

They coach men to lie about Stephen, claiming he speaks against Moses and against God. They stir up the crowd and drag him before the religious council.

They also set up false witnesses who said, “This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us.” (Acts 6:13–14)

The accusations are twisted echoes of Jesus' own words about the temple and the law. Stephen is not despising Moses or the temple; he is proclaiming that Jesus fulfills what the law and the temple pointed to, and that in Christ the center of God's presence and the way of approaching God has changed. The old system of sacrifice cannot save; Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice on the cross is now the way of forgiveness.

Then Luke records an astonishing detail:

And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel. (Acts 6:15)

While hostile eyes stare at him, Stephen's face shines with a calm, heavenly radiance. He is not frantic, bitter, or defensive. His countenance reflects the presence of God. Like Moses' face after being in God's presence, Stephen's face bears a hint of glory even as he stands on the brink of suffering.

Application for believers:

Sometimes following Jesus faithfully will bring misunderstanding and even false accusation. People may distort your motives, twist your words, or accuse you of being against things you actually honor. In those moments:

- Will you keep speaking with wisdom and in the Spirit?
- Will you trust God with your reputation?
- Will your heart be so fixed on Christ that, instead of anger and fear, there is a quiet radiance that points to Him?

Stephen will soon lay down his life for Jesus. Acts 6 prepares us to see that his courage did not suddenly appear; it flowed out of a life already full of faith, the Holy Spirit, wisdom, and faithful service.

A challenge for believers

Acts 6 confronts us with several uncomfortable but necessary questions:

- Am I willing to serve? Not just in visible roles, but in practical, often unnoticed ministries that keep the church healthy and care for the vulnerable.
- Am I growing in character? Do I have a good reputation? Am I learning to walk in the Spirit and in wisdom?
- Am I guarding unity? Do I listen humbly when there are complaints or tensions, asking how God might be calling me to help, rather than rushing to blame or division?
- Am I ready for opposition? If obedience to Jesus brings resistance, am I prepared to obey God rather than people, with a steady, gracious spirit?

Ask the Lord to make you more like Stephen: full of faith, full of the Holy Spirit, willing to serve, ready to speak, and steady under pressure.

An invitation to those who do not yet know Christ

The men who opposed Stephen accused him of attacking the temple and the law, but the deeper issue was this: they could not accept that Jesus of Nazareth is the One to whom the law and the temple were always pointing.

The law shows us God's holiness and our sin. The temple sacrifices pointed ahead to a greater sacrifice that could truly take away sin. Jesus came as the Lamb of God. On the cross He shed His blood for your sins. He took the judgment we deserve. Then God raised Him from the dead, declaring that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

Forgiveness is not earned by religious effort, good works, or ceremonies. It is received by turning to Jesus in faith—by repenting of your sin and trusting in what He has done for you. He offers you:

- Forgiveness of all your sins
- A new heart and a new life
- The gift of the Holy Spirit
- A place in His family, now and forever

If you sense that God is drawing you, you can respond right where you are. Your own words are best, but something like this may express your heart:

“Lord God, I know that I have sinned against You. I cannot save myself. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins, shedding His blood for me, and that You raised Him from the dead. I confess that He is Lord. I turn from my sin and ask You to forgive me. Take my life, change my heart, and teach me to follow You. I place my trust in Jesus Christ alone as my Savior and Lord.”

If you truly turn to Him, He will not turn you away. The same risen Lord who strengthened Stephen will be with you, forgive you, and start a new work in your life today.