

A WHOLE NEW TEAM

WEEK 7

AN
ATHLETE
STUDY

95 MPH

Have you ever considered how fast a professional baseball player swings a bat to hit a 95+ mile an hour fastball? If I stood at the plate, I probably wouldn't even see the ball coming, much less get the bat around in time. It's all just happening too fast.

As we jump back into *Acts*, the church is growing like crazy. And, like any church that has experienced growth, with more people come more needs. Not only that, but it's more likely that some needs fall through the cracks.

In today's passage, we see just such an issue arise between two groups. The first of these two groups were "Hebrew" Jews from the region around Jerusalem—they spoke, dressed, worked, and worshiped Hebrew-ishly. They were on home turf.

The second group was the **Hellenists** (Greek-speaking Jews). They probably came from outside the region of Jerusalem and Judea. For historical reasons, when Jesus lived, there were more Jews outside of Jerusalem than inside—they spoke, dressed, worked, and even worshiped God in Greek.

The **complaint** arose because Greek-speaking **widows** were being **neglected**. This wasn't intentional. However, the church, like a 90+ mile an hour fast ball, was just growing too fast. To address the situation, the apostles realized they needed help... quick!

ACTS 6:1–7

¹ Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." ⁵ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶ These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷ And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

We are Your Church, We are the hope on earth. Build your kingdom here, Let the darkness fear. Show your mighty hand, Heal our streets and land. Set your Church on fire.

In our passage we continue to witness the rapid growth of God's Church. Scan the QR code to worship. Let your heart pray along with the lyrics—that God would excite the hearts and minds of his people to pray and seek revival.



DISCUSSION

If someone needed help with an important project, what reasons could you give as to why they should choose you?

1. What complaint arose within the Christian community during this time? (1)

2. How did the apostles address the issue yet maintain their priorities? (2)

3. What process did they introduce to select these new leaders? (3)

4. Why do you think the apostles used the selection process that they did? (3-6)

5. The study notes define the desired character quality of the seven as a good reputation based on God's control of their lives. Does your reputation reflect God's control of your life, why or why not?

Reading about the selection of the seven, I hope you're not discouraged. We're all in process together. Keep seeking the Lord. If you have questions, talk to your coach today!

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

A WHOLE NEW TEAM

WEEK 7

AN
ATHLETE
STUDY

STUDY NOTES

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

"Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are." These words from the famed UCLA coach John Wooden are a reminder that our focus, our "concern," should be placed on the right thing.

In today's passage, the apostles faced criticism from within the Church. A **complaint**, like in the introduction, that arose from cultural differences in the community. The **widows** of the **Hellenists were being neglected in the daily distribution** of food. How did the apostles respond to this complaint?

Deuteronomy 10:17–18 describes *God, who is unbiased and... who justly treats the orphan and widow, and who loves resident foreigners, giving them food and clothing.* In other words, God's heart goes out to those who are vulnerable. He cares for the lowest on the social ladder, people who can offer nothing in return. The apostles shared and resembled God's heart, not ignoring the complaint or becoming defensive, but responding with wisdom and care.

The Bible tells us **the twelve** [apostles] **summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables."** Now hold on just a minute! Are you telling me that the apostles were "too good" to wait on tables? Is this a slap in the face to the food service industry?

No, the apostles were not making a judgment based on superiority, but on **calling**. Think of it like zone-defense versus man-to-man. In man-to-man defense, each player constantly responds to the actions of a corresponding offensive player.

In the early days of the church, the apostles could have functioned this way and it would have been fine. Now, however, the apostles busily led a **booming** Church. Acts 4:4 states there were 5,000 men, which doesn't include women and children, so it's very likely the actual number is well over 15,000–20,000. By Acts 5, they've stopped counting, just that "**multitudes**" are coming to Christ.

Because of this, they had to switch to a zone-defense in which each player was assigned an area of responsibility. They had to lead and teach and could not do so if all of their time was spent washing dishes.

GOD'S TEAM

DELEGATES HIS AUTHORITY

Just like your coach, who must depend on others to do all the jobs associated with a successful team, the apostles needed to select leaders who could take responsibility in their new defensive strategy. This strategy required **seven men from among** the group of Greek-speaking Jews. However, not just anybody could be trusted with this task. The apostles required men who had **already** displayed the character qualities this job demanded. Each had to be **of good repute**—known by the group and proven through experience.

In addition to a good reputation, the apostles wanted men who were **full of the Spirit and of wisdom**. What they were really looking for were men who reflected God's control over their conduct. Having a good reputation is one thing, but having a good reputation while reflecting God's control in your life is completely different. If you remember Wooden's quote, this is the difference between reputation and character. People can manage their reputation while seeking approval from others. However, if God is really in charge in our lives, our convictions of sin and righteousness he will shape our character.

THE DELEGATES

This idea of the apostles **pleased the whole gathering**. Seven men were then selected **full of faith and of the Holy Spirit**. Were these men perfect? No! 1 John 1:10 tells us, *if we say we have not sinned, we make [God] a liar and his word is not in us.* Remember that the test of selection wasn't perfection, it was a reputation based on God's control of their lives.

If a situation arose and people had to be delegated to an important task, would you qualify? Could a leader trust you with an appointed task based on your steady character and intimate relationship with God? Remember, perfection is too lofty a goal for any of us, what we are talking about is a pattern of life. Is the pattern of your life a good reputation based on God's control, with only minor lapses? Or is the pattern of your life unsteadiness, shifting priorities, and self-gratification with only minor glimpses of godliness? My prayer for each of us is that our work and character have the effect of these seven men, that **the word of God** continue **to increase** and as Acts 6:7 says, **"the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem"** It's no longer "addition," now they're multiplying. They've changed maths!