

REFLECTION GUIDE

ACTS 6:1-15 - HEROES IN THE CHURCH

KEY TERMS

Hellenists - Jews whose families had previously lived outside of Jerusalem, and therefore spoke Greek and were largely influenced by Greek culture, but who were now living in Jerusalem.

Daily distribution - Only mentioned in Acts 6:1, but evidently a regular practice of the Early Church to care for widows, who would have had little ability to care for themselves in 1st century Greco-Roman culture. It seems this *distribution* included food based on the comment about serving tables in verse 2.

Stephen - One of 7 men chosen to help with the daily distribution in verse 5; Stephen is a prominent figure in the rest of chapter 6 and in chapter 7 as he becomes the first Christian martyred for their faith.

DID YOU KNOW?

Laying on of hands was a ritual practiced in the Bible. In the OT, priests laid hands on sacrificial animals before performing sacrifices (see Lev 8:14). In the NT, Jesus laid hands on children while blessing them and the apostles did so to commission people to ministry (Acts 6:6) and on certain occasions when someone received the Spirit (Acts 19:5-6).

BACKGROUND

On the heels of the first internal conflict in the Early Church (Acts 5:1-11) and the second arrest of the apostles (Acts 5:17-42), comes another potential source of trouble as *a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution* (v. 1). It appears that the Early Church was caring for widows by providing food for them daily and one group within the Church (the Hellenists) was concerned that their widows were not receiving fair treatment from the distributing group (the native Hebrews). In response to this complaint, the apostles gathered the Christ-followers and decided to appoint people to address the problem so they didn't have to *give up preaching the word of God to serve tables* (v. 2). They chose 7 men for the task, prayed for them, laid hands on them and the result was *the word of God continued to increase, with even a great many priests becoming Christians* (v. 5-7). However, the Church continued to face outside pressure as Stephen, one of the 7 appointed to help serve, was seized and accused of speaking *blasphemous words against Moses and God* (v. 9-11). When the crowd accuses Stephen of blasphemy against Moses, they are using Moses' name figuratively as a representative for the Old Testament law (the first 5 books of the OT), of which Moses is traditionally considered to be the author. Their issue with Stephen's teaching centers on their concern that *Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us* (v. 14).

GOING DEEPER

Read Mark 10:45, 1 Peter 4:10, and all of 1 Corinthians 12. What do these verses teach you about serving? How do they challenge you to use your gifts in the context of a local church?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read Acts 6:1-15. Make 5-7 quick observations about these verses. What stands out to you?
2. Why will some tensions always persist, even in a healthy church? How do social, political, economic, ethnic differences exacerbate normal tensions?
3. What do we learn from the Acts 6 example about problem solving in a healthy church? How do they wisely balance conviction and flexibility as they walk through this situation?
4. How are these new ministry leaders identified? What qualities are they looking for in leaders for the church?

LIVING THE WORD

5. What potential tensions or challenges can you imagine for our church in the next twelve months?
6. If we apply the wisdom of this passage in Acts 6 to our church, what do you think that would look like?
7. Read what Jesus says about servant-leadership in Mark 10:43-45. How do the words and life of Jesus challenge and encourage you in your service and ministry?
8. Spend several minutes praying together for the mission of our church, for opportunities to serve, for wisdom to solve problems as they arise, and for obedience to take initiative in the months ahead. Pray expectantly for God to provide opportunities and for eyes to see them when they occur. Ask for the Spirit's help.