


**A Five-Day Devotional Journey**
**March 2 - 8, 2008**
**Acts 6:1-15**

# Chosen to Serve

## 1 Rumbblings of discontent

**Read.** Acts 6:1 NLT

But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumbblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.

**Read.** James 5:9 Message

Friends, don't complain about each other. A far greater complaint could be lodged against you, you know. The Judge is standing just around the corner.

**Think.**

- What was the source of the "rumbblings of discontent" in this early church environment? What factors do you potentially see involved in sparking this conflict?
- How do you tend to handle "discrimination" — those times when you feel unjustly overlooked or neglected? a) pout; b) shout; c) address the issue; d) play the martyr; e) take my ball & go home; or what?
- What are some boundaries you would suggest for sharing complaints and grievances? What would you say is the difference between healthy complaining and unhealthy whining over a situation?
- How does James' word of wisdom help you in setting healthy "complaint" boundaries?

**Pray.**

Lord, free me from unhealthy self-absorption with "my rights" and feelings of entitlement. Lead me in addressing problems directly and in love.

**Live.**

Pay close attention to how you handle personal conflicts this week — and seek the Lord for needed change.

In a well-furnished kitchen there are not only crystal goblets and silver platters, but waste cans and compost buckets—some containers used to serve fine meals, others to take out the garbage. Become the kind of container God can use to present any and every kind of gift to his guests for their blessing.

2 Timothy 2:20-21, Message

The hard realities of Acts chapter six serve as a wonderful riposte to any delusions arising from a dreamy reading of Acts chapter two. Acts 2 presents us with a church in harmony that just seems to "happen"; a church community where everyone gets along and just can't seem to get enough of each other. But whatever honeymoon the church experienced in its early days is clearly over by the time we get to Acts 6.

**Rumbblings of discontent. Where did these come from?**

The church moves from cozy parlor to messy kitchen with complaints to the chef about poor service in the dining room. Perhaps these folks aren't so different from us after all. As satisfying as that revelation may be, even more instructive is observing how the *maitre d'* (the twelve) handled the situation. Rather than bolting or blaming, the need is defined and the solution presented: servers are chosen, seven men full of the Spirit and wisdom. Needed structure is now supplied and the body lets out a collective sigh of appreciation as needs are once again met and fairness demonstrated.

Standing tall among the servers is Stephen, "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit." In both word and deed Stephen quickly shows himself to be no mere "compost bucket"; Stephen is a silver platter serving the fine meal of grace and truth in Jesus. His record of service and faith provides us with this bottom-line Advent-ure challenge: "become the kind of container God can use to present any and every kind of gift to his guests for their blessing."

Just don't let it throw you if you, like Stephen, encounter some rude customers...

## 2) Select seven men...

**Read.** Acts 6:2-4 NLT

So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, "We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word."

**Read.** Ephesians 4:12-13 Message

He handed out gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor-teacher to train Christ's followers in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.

**Think.**

- What solution did the apostles propose to the problem of food distribution? What did they recognize they couldn't do? What did they identify as their key priorities?
- What does Paul identify as the purpose of various giftings and ministries in the church? What is the ultimate goal he identifies? What part are you playing in bringing this about in your church? How well are you personally reaching this goal?

**Pray.**

Show me where to play, Lord! Break through any shell of paralysis that would keep me sidelined.

**Live.**

Reassess your current ministry involvement(s). Take the first step towards needed changes.

## 4) A man full of God's grace and power

**Read.** Acts 6:8-10 NLT

Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed amazing miracles and signs among the people. But one day some men from the Synagogue of Freed Slaves, as it was called, started to debate with him. They were Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and the province of Asia. None of them could stand against the wisdom and the Spirit with which Stephen spoke.

**Read.** 1 Timothy 4:11-14 Message

Get the word out. Teach all these things. And don't let anyone put you down because you're young. Teach believers with your life: by word, by demeanor, by love, by faith, by integrity. Stay at your post reading Scripture, giving counsel, teaching. And that special gift of ministry you were given when the leaders of the church laid hands on you and prayed—keep that dusted off and in use.

**Think:**

- How is Stephen described? What did he do? What opponents did he encounter? How did he respond to them?
- Stephen's life was characterized by grace and power. What two words would you use to describe your own life? What two words would you *like* to see describe your life?
- How is Paul's instruction to Timothy fitting for Stephen as well? How does it apply to you right now?
- What "special gift" do you believe you have to offer the body of Christ? How well are you "keeping it dusted off and in use"?

**Pray.**

Lord, let my life be an ever deepening display of your amazing grace and power.

**Live:**

Meditate on the truths of 1 Timothy 4:11-14.

## 3) Seven were presented to the apostles

**Read.** Acts 6:5-7 NLT

Everyone liked this idea, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (an earlier convert to the Jewish faith). These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them. So God's message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too.

**Read.** Galatians 6:9-10 Message

So let's not allow ourselves to get fatigued doing good. At the right time we will harvest a good crop if we don't give up, or quit. Right now, therefore, every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith.

**Think.**

- What kept this church from getting stuck or blowing up over this issue of unfairness in food distribution? Why didn't this problem slow the momentum of the church?
- What were the qualifications of the seven men chosen to serve?
- What personal qualifications do you see in yourself to serve in the body of Christ? To what areas of service do you presently feel called? How are you pursuing this call?

**Pray.**

Lord, help me to hear and answer your call to serve whenever and however you need me.

**Live.**

Identify one area of service where you want to grow.

## 5) His face became bright as an angel's

**Read.** Acts 6:11-15 NLT

So they persuaded some men to lie about Stephen, saying, "We heard him blaspheme Moses, and even God." This roused the people, the elders, and the teachers of religious law. So they arrested Stephen and brought him before the high council.

The lying witnesses said, "This man is always speaking against the holy Temple and against the law of Moses. We have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy the Temple and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

At this point everyone in the high council stared at Stephen, because his face became as bright as an angel's.

**Think.**

- When his opponents can't answer Stephen, what do they resort to? What specific "charges" do they bring against Stephen? What did they claim he was saying about Moses? About the Temple?
- Why were his accusers captivated by his presence when he came before the council?
- What is your overall impression of Stephen in his handling of himself and the outright lies being told about him?
- What primary lesson do you learn from Stephen?

**Pray.**

Lord, bless me with the faith and fortitude I see in Stephen. Grant me to move with his grace and to serve with his passion — and give me thick skin in processing opposition!

**Live.**

Encourage someone experiencing conflict in ministry.