

Is it more important for the church to minister to people's spiritual needs or to their physical needs? So think about that for a moment. Share it with someone beside you. Is it more important for the church to minister to someone's physical needs or their spiritual needs?

So you may think if some of you might think, okay, well it's more important for the church, of course, to minister to someone's spiritual needs. So you might think of a verse like Romans 10:14 that says, how can they, how can they call on one that they haven't believed in? And how can they believe in one that they haven't heard of? And how can they hear of him without someone preaching to them? Or Colossians 1:28 that talks about presenting the word of God in its fullness.

Or 1st Peter 3:15 that talks about always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. So you look at these verses and you say it's more important to meet the spiritual needs of people. Or some might think, well no, it's, you know, I look at what scripture says and I think it's important to meet physical needs because you look at what Jesus did and all of the miracles he did ministering to people's physical needs. He washed the disciples feet and told them to go and do likewise. James writes in James 1:27, that religion that God accepts is to look after orphans and widows.

So you conclude it's important to minister to someone's physical needs. John Stott, in his helpful little book, *Christian Mission in the World*, he presents the case that both are really important to minister to the spiritual needs of the church and to the physical needs of the church. So now some of you are patting yourselves on the back and you're thinking, oh yeah, I knew that. But the point is it is very important for us as a church family to figure out how to minister the spiritual needs of our people. And the physical needs of our people.

And the passage we're going to look at today is the early church, this growing church, beginning to struggle a little bit with some growing pains as they step into that issue that we've just mentioned. So look with me. Listen with me to Acts 6, 1, 7. 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. So the 12 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.

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 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word. This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. Also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenius, and Nicholas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid their hands on them. 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. So this movement is not just a concept that is spreading and spreading quickly, but it's a community that's multiplying from the 20 or so that would have been in the room at Pentecost and received the filling of the Holy spirit from that 20 or so to then 3,000 more and more after that. And in just months time, this group may have gone from around 20 to 4,000 or more. That was the church in Jerusalem.

So reality teaches us that when a community multiplies, infrastructure issues pop up. Right. You, I think about when Amanda and I got married and we got used to life just the two of us. And we had certain rhythms in life. And when it was just the two of us, and then Ashley came along and when our family, when our community was growing and

multiplying, lots of things changed.

We spent money on different things. We had to have a different kind of space. And the way we spent our time, it changed. And then Ryan came along and things changed more. And then Josiah came along.

And as our community grew, things needed to change to adjust to the growing community. So on the surface, this passage provides clear leadership counsel to a growing community, this growing community of the church. And in many ways, it's the same counsel that Jethro, the Father in Law of Moses offered to him back in Exodus 18. That was to train up some leaders and share leadership. So the apostles, this issue is presented to them and they are compelled to continue working to minister to the spiritual needs of the people.

And they choose seven men full of the Spirit. And that's important. We'll hit on that a lot. So they choose seven men full of the Spirit to minister to the physical needs of the people in their midst. So again, to an extent, this is a pretty clear narrative with a pretty clear teaching point, share leadership.

And because this is God's living word, we can look to this and we can, as we sit with it and pause with it, we can glean more and more about who God is and lessons about ourself and his people. So I want to do that with you, to pause and sit with this passage and consider the three issues or three of the issues that the passage is addressing, and then the one solution that the passage is giving. So the first of the issues is the quantity of physical needs. There are so many, so many in fact, that when they do this daily distribution of food, there's so many receiving it that some are being overlooked. Now you might think to yourself Back to Acts 4:34, that says, where Luke writes about this early church, that there were no needy persons among them because of the way that they were sharing with each other.

And that was true. And then the church continues to grow and persecution comes in, and now they find themselves in a spot where there are needy persons among them. So many, in fact, that ministering to their needs is becoming so complex and the effectiveness with which they're doing it is now in dispute. So the question to the apostles is how can we effectively minister to the physical needs of our people and to the spiritual needs of our people? Because both are important.

So here I want to press pause on considering and thinking about the early church. And I want to ask the same question about our covenant church family. How are we as our church family ministering to the physical needs and the spiritual needs of this church family? Because both are important. So we think about what we're doing right now in a weekly worship service where our desire in this time is to be ministering to the spiritual needs of our people, to be offering an encounter with Jesus through songs we sing, through prayers we give, through the teaching of the Word.

Then we think, you know, other ways that we want to minister to the spiritual needs of our people is through small groups and through Christ centered relationships where our desire is that people would see, know, accept, care for and enjoy one another with the glory of God in view that we would see each other where we are in our walk with the Lord and help each other take a next step in our walk with the Lord. So those are in very quick summary, how we seek to minister to the spiritual needs of our church family. What do we do to minister to the physical needs of our church family? We think about it in terms of we call it our congregational care ministry, or others may think of it as our deacons ministry. And the word deacon actually comes from the Greek word diakone, which means serve or help or minister.

And it shows up twice in this passage. The the part of the passage that's translated the daily distribution of food that comes from the Greek word diacone as well in its verb form. Then the part of the passage that talks about waiting on tables, again, that comes from this same Greek word. So following the counsel of this passage, we appoint deacons or helpers to lead efforts of ministering to those with particular physical needs in our church family. So I want to just give you a real summary of what some of the deacons do to minister to the physical needs in our church family.

We have one deacon who oversees the hospital and the rehabilitation visitation team, which is a team of five servants. And every day, one of the every weekday, one of those servants contacts the hospital to find out if any of our Covenant Church family are in the hospital. And when they find out who is in the hospital, they go visit that person. And then they follow up with those people through their time in the hospital and then into their time in rehabilitation. If that's part of

their journey, they'll pray with them and interact with them and seek to comfort them and give them encouragement.

We have another deacon who oversees the visits to our senior ministers, senior ministers, our senior adults who are also ministering. But so this is a team of 15 servants who they get together and they plan out how they can make contact with around 50 of our older adults here in our church family who are struggling because of illness or because of physical limitations and can't get out and do all the things that they used to do. And this team of 15 individuals will connect with them each month to seek to encourage them. There's another deacon who oversees our Helping Hands ministry. These servants tackle home maintenance tasks and accessibility needs and safety issues.

There's another deacon who kind of watches over all of this and makes sure that we're not letting people fall through the cracks. Tracks in the works there. The deacons have sensed that the Lord is inviting them to expand their circle of care to include people with intellectual, developmental, and physical disabilities and their caregivers. So I think about all of those things that this congregational care ministry is doing. And I think two things.

One, I think that's absolutely beautiful. And two, I think that's a little overwhelming to think about all of those needs, those physical needs that exist just in our church family. So the first issue that is addressed in this passage is this, of the quantity of needs. And the solution that's given is we need the help of the Holy Spirit in you to see a need and show compassion. And then we need the help of others with the Holy Spirit in them to share the task of ministering to the physical needs of others.

So we need the Holy Spirit in us, and we need the help of others who have the Holy Spirit in them. The second issue that is addressed in this passage is the division of diversity. We read about the Hebraic Jews whose primary language would have been Aramaic, and they were native to Israel. And then there's this group of Hellenistic Jews. Their primary language was Greek, and they came from outside Israel.

And at this time, in the church of Jerusalem, the Hellenistic Jews would have made up 10 to 20% of the church in Jerusalem. So the division was that the Hellenistic Jews said, our widows are not getting fair distribution, fair treatment when it comes to the daily distribution of food. So here's what we know. The linguistic and the social differences of these groups cause cultural differences. And in a broken world, differences can cause division.

And we're no different today. Our sinful nature leads us to make judgments, almost instant judgments, on anybody that we encounter who is different than we are. If we meet someone from a different country, then our sinful nature tempts us to judge what we think is the best of our country and think about what is the worst of their country. And we see them in that light. The sinful nature wants us to judge others in that way.

But it goes across the board to different areas of life. It could be that you come across someone that they appear to have more money than you, and the sinful nature in you tempts you to judge that, well, they must be materialistic, or they probably don't get enough time with their family, they're putting their priorities in the wrong place. Or you come across someone who you perceive they have less money than you, and the sinful nature tempts you to judge and say, well, they must be making poor choices with their life. Or it goes to. We may look at someone who has a different body type than us that we perceive as A more desirable body type.

And we in our sinful nature judge that well, that person, they're probably obsessed with their their body image. Or we might see someone who has a different body type than us that is less desirable than our body type and are the sinful nature in us tempts us to judge that. Well again, this person, they're probably making poor choices. If we see someone who's more talkative than us, we judge that they're self absorbed. If we see someone who's less talkative than us, we judge that they don't have enough confidence.

So I mean, the list goes on and on. When someone is different than us, the sinful nature in us tempts us to judge them based on that difference. Brothers and sisters, we need to notice this tendency in our sinful nature and invite the Spirit to show us how to see people the way that Jesus sees them. When we think of how Jesus treated people he spoke to and cared for, the tax collector, the poor, the rich, the leper, the Samaritan, one woman at the well, the Roman soldier, everyone he cared for with compassion. If we're going to prevent diversity from growing division, we must see people as Jesus sees them.

And if we're going to see people as Jesus sees them, then, then two things need to happen. One, I need to get to know Jesus better so that I know how he sees people. And I need to get to know those who are different than me better so I know how, so I can understand them and see them as Jesus sees them.

So the second issue that we address here is that we're tempted to allow diversity to create division. And the solution again is similar. We need the help of the Holy Spirit in us to see others, to help us see others the way Jesus sees them. And then we need the help of others with the Holy Spirit in them to help us provide welcome to anyone who is different than we are. We need the Holy Spirit in us and we need the help of others with the Holy Spirit in them.

So the third issue that this passage addresses is the variety of calling. In verse 2, the apostles are reflecting. Is it right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word to wait on tables? So which is more important to address the physical need or the spiritual need? We considered this at the start of this message and came to the conclusion that they are both important.

The church must minister to the physical needs of our people and the spiritual needs of our people. So Luke is not suggesting that the apostles embraced some kind of hierarchy of task, but they are encouraging an understanding of one's calling, and you make your decision based on your understanding of your calling and the move of the Spirit in that moment. Romans 12:4,8 says this. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us.

If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith. If it is serving, then serve it. If it's teaching, then teach. If it is encouraging, then give encouragement. If it is giving, then give generously.

If it is to lead, do it diligently. If it is to show mercy, then do it cheerfully. There's no mention of any gift being better than one of the other gifts. Each of us needs to live into the function, the gifting, the calling that we've been given. So then you ask.

Well, I, for instance, I believe that God has called me to preach and teach the Word. Does that mean that I don't need to serve? No. It seems as though the Lord will often choose me to. Will choose me to use me in the teaching and preaching more often than he might choose to use me in other ways.

But that's not exclusively how he is going to use me or to use any of us. So then you ask. Well, because it's not a clear black and white answer as to how we should employ our gifts and when we should employ our gifts, we realize that the solution again is that I need the help of the Holy Spirit in me to show me the roles that I'm to fill in the moments that I'm to fill them. And I need the help of others with the Holy Spirit in them to fill the roles that I can't fill. So the only way that this eclectic, bedraggled, beautiful group of followers of Christ are united in community for the cause of Christ is depending on the Holy Spirit and leaning on one another.

When we do that, we can minister to the physical and to the spiritual needs of God's people. Not perfectly, but faithfully. So I know it's tricky when we talk about we need the help of the Holy Spirit when. When you can't see or hear the Holy Spirit. But since we have the gift of the living Word, which is the word of God, the Word of the Spirit, I encourage you to spend more and more time in His Word to get to know the Spirit and to know the Spirit's voice.

So then I also know that it's messy and inconvenient to lean into the help to have others help us out. But even though it's messy and inconvenient to lean into, to ask for the help of others, it doesn't change the fact that we need others to help us. We are an expression of the Body of Christ, and we are unified. We find our unity in our one faith in Christ and what he did on the cross for us. I want to close this morning as we think about our call as the united body of Christ, united around what he has done for us, that we think about his sacrifice and we share communion together.