

God's Deacons *Acts 6:1-7, 1 Timothy 3:8-12*

Good morning

Bruce Larson, in his book "*Wind and Fire*", points out some interesting facts about Sandhill Cranes.

He says, "*These large birds, which fly great distances across continents, have three remarkable qualities.*"

1. The cranes rotate or **share** leadership responsibilities so that no one bird has to do all the work.
2. The cranes chose leaders who can **handle** turbulence.
3. As the one bird is leading, the other cranes are honking with affirmation and **encouragement**.

Now that's not a bad model for Church leadership either.

The Church needs leaders who can handle turbulence and are aware that leadership responsibilities are to be shared. But we also need church members who encourage our leaders.

Another thing that Sandhill Cranes do is that they all **follow** the God given directions that were placed within them.

The main reason these birds can lead so efficiently is that they can **follow**.

In order to be a good leader, someone has to be a good follower because we are all people under authority. If someone can't submit to others within the body, they won't be a good leader.

Please open your Bibles to two places, first turn to *1 Timothy 3*, and then turn to the *Book of Acts 6*

Last time in *Acts 5*, we learned that when the Apostles would not relent from teaching the Gospel, it angered the religious leaders, and they plotted to kill those followers of Christ!

Then the LORD gave one of the council members an idea, and he shared it with the other religious leaders.

Acts 5:38 And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing.

Acts 5:39 but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it — lest you even be found to fight against God." NKJV

The Church continued to grow, and as it grew, it began to experience some growing pains.

One of the most important leadership qualities we look for is a servant's heart, from someone who is committed, knows how to follow, and considers serving the LORD a privilege.

Just like the Sandhill crane, a person who knows how to follow will always be a better leader. Conflicts happen within all healthy relationships and can impact the entire family.

The Church family is made up of people with a range of thoughts and opinions on almost every subject and situation.

Conflicts can be extremely stressful and destructive.

So, let's see how the Early Church dealt with this challenge.

I. First internal conflict.

Read *Acts 6:1-2*

Even though this passage is about Deacons, there are a lot of practical lessons for followers of Christ to glean.

Up until this point in Church history, except for the sin of Annanias and Saphira, the attacks on Christians only came from **outside** the Church.

We need to understand that we are all people under authority.

Ephesians 5:20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Ephesians 5:21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

We have no king but King Jesus, but there are leaders placed within the body of Christ. So, as the Church grew, the potential for strife grew as well.

A division started because the Hellenistic believers felt as if the Jewish believers were neglecting certain members.

During this time, there were two groups of Jews: the Hebrews were those who were born in Palestine and mainly spoke the Hebrew language.

The Hellenist Jewish believers had been born outside Palestine and mainly spoke Greek, as they had adopted Greek culture.

The Hellenist believers thought that their widows were not getting their fair share of the daily food and necessities and were *“being overlooked in the daily distribution of food”*.

We previously learned that many people sold their property, gave the funds to the Church, and apparently, the Apostles started a food program with some of that money.

The Apostles had the Spiritual authority over the Church and tried to decide what was best for the entire assembly.

As leaders, we have to make decisions based on what is best for the **entire** body. Sometimes one group doesn't agree with certain decisions that are made, but that's part of being a leader.

Both the Old Testament and the Lord Jesus Christ taught that the community should pay special attention to serving widows.

James 1:26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. NKJV

The oversight of not serving these widows does not seem to be deliberate, but because of the size of the Church at this time, someone's needs were bound to be overlooked.

The enemy will always use **misunderstandings** or something that has been overlooked as a way to cause divisions in the body of Christ, so the Apostles had to come up with a solution.

II. The LORD's conflict resolution.

Read *Acts 6:3-6*

The Apostles said, *“It is important for us to study and pray so that the body is well fed spiritually, and that we hear God's voice concerning the body.”*

So, they said, *“Let's appoint some other qualified men to attend to the physical needs of the Church.”*

Then they appointed the first Deacons over the Early Church.

Deacons have an important role in the local church, but it is different from the Elders' role and duties.

The role of Deacons is to take care of the **physical** needs of the Church, so the Elders can concentrate on their call to teach the Word and shepherd the sheep under their care.

Biblically, Elders, Overseers, Bishops, and Pastors “**shepherd**” the “flock” of God, which is the Church, that has been entrusted to them. These terms are synonymous in the New Testament.

Ultimately, Jesus is our Chief Shepherd, and the Pastor/Elders are called the under-shepherds of the flock.

The word Deacon is derived from the Greek word “*diakonos*” (dee-aw-konos), which means **servant**.

All Christians are called to be servants, but Deacons, like Elders and Pastors, have a **special call** and therefore must meet certain qualifications.

Here, in *Acts*, Deacons are also called to meet the needs of the widows, orphans, and the poor. But the responsibilities of a Deacon are greater than that.

Some of the potential responsibilities of a Deacon: ushering, church facilities, visiting shut-ins, and other tasks, such as supporting other Church leaders as needed.

Notice, ***“They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit.”***

Because of the reliance of Stephen upon the Holy Spirit and his willingness to serve, the Lord used him to do incredible things in the ministry, which we will learn about in the coming weeks.

Luke 12:48 to whom much is given, much will be required.

Even though Deacons are not the Church’s spiritual overseers, their character is very important, as they represent Christ and His Church as leaders as well.

Turn to ***1 Timothy 3*** for Biblical qualifications of a Deacon.

III. Qualified people.

Read ***1 Timothy 3:8-12***

The qualifications of a Deacon are similar to the qualifications of an Elder.

Likewise, i.e., the qualities of a Deacon are serious , just like the qualifications of an Elder are serious.

Remember, the Bible is our instruction guide, not only for life, but for all Church matters as well.

These qualities for a Deacon will rub off on someone who has spent time with Jesus. We are talking about people who follow Christ closely here.

This is what happens to someone who spends time looking at Him, listening to Him, learning from Him, living like Him.

All believers should spend time with Jesus, and these qualities will rub off on us as well.

This is someone who works for and worships Christ.

a. Reverent is a person who is serious when it comes to things of the LORD and the business of Christ's Church.

There is nothing wrong with a sense of humor, but when it comes to obeying God's Word or the business of the Church, we need to take it seriously.

This is not speaking of religious duty, this is talking about an authentic walk with Jesus, being totally surrendered to Him.

In other words, these people take the call and duties of a Deacon seriously because it's important to them.

b. *Not double-tongued.* (insincere)

Double-tongued means to give two statements or answers that contradict each other. Being a double-tongued person is two-faced, and the person is not the same in private as in public.

A leader who gives statements that contradict can cause much confusion and division within the body of Christ.

Jesus said in *Matthew 5:37*, ***But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one. NKJV***

As a leader of the church, when we give an answer, we must be sure of our decision. We must be sure that we have thought it out, prayed it out, and checked it out in God's Word.

But once a decision is made, we are not to be ***double-tongued***.

By being wishy-washy in our decision-making, we can cause bitterness and confusion within the body.

Being wishy-washy may also create a lack of confidence and trust for the leadership of the Church.

c. *Not given to much wine.*

This is **not** an absolute prohibition of alcohol, but a Deacon must not be preoccupied with alcohol or known as a drunkard.

d. *Not greedy for money.*

Everybody needs to make a living, and the LORD provides for us. **But...**

If a man is always preoccupied chasing the next dollar or business venture, how can he have time for the ministry of the church?

1 Timothy 6:6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

1 Timothy 6:7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

1 Timothy 6:8 And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

1 Timothy 6:9 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. NKJV

e. Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

A Deacon must know the mystery of the Gospel and not be opposed to the doctrine of historic, core Christian beliefs.

Colossians 1:26 the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.

Colossians 1:27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. NKJV

They must always be ready to share their conversion testimony.

NIV 1 Peter 3:15 Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, NIV

For a Deacon here at Living Faith, the person must agree doctrinally with the church and be willing and able to communicate their personal testimony to others.

f. “*Let these first be tested or proved*”.

A potential Deacon cannot be a new convert; they must have a servant’s heart with a desire to serve and not be a person simply desiring to obtain a title or position.

Matthew 20:28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”
NKJV

g. “*Being found blameless*”

Some believe *blameless* means without sin, but this cannot be the meaning of the passage, because it goes against the teachings of *1 John* and *Romans*, which say “**all sin**”.

The word *blameless* means a Deacon does not have a habitual, unrepentant sin in their life.

The person is not specifically known for a pattern of sin.

A Deacon must be just, loving, and honest.

By the way, we are not talking about a person’s life before conversion either. This is referring to their behavior since they have received Christ and become a new creation in Christ.

The question is: *Does the person currently have a habitual sin issue in their life?*

They should have a good reputation outside of the church.

h. *Husband of one wife.*

Whether the person is single or married, they must be living a sexually pure life. For the married person, they must be faithfully devoted to their spouse.

Andy Woods wrote an extensive paper on the meaning of “*THE HUSBAND OF ONE WIFE*.” Here was his conclusion...

This phrase in the original language, *husband of one wife*, does not deal with the candidate’s legal married status.

But rather pertains to fidelity as part of the candidate’s character at the time he is considered for the office.

Although it is acceptable for the church to examine the candidate’s past sins to ascertain the content of his character.

It is inappropriate for the Church to use *1 Timothy 3* as a basis for holding a candidate’s past sins against him in isolation from his current character...

Rather than by adding to what Paul said, even for the purpose of maintaining high standards for Church leadership.

i. *Leading his family well.*

If the potential candidate or their spouse is a gossip, or their children are running wild, this could disqualify them.

All Church leaders hear and know sensitive things about the Church and its members.

If the candidate hears sensitive things and then shares them with others, this can cause bitterness and division in the body.

Deacons serve the Church by modeling ministry to others.

Deacons are to minister to the physical needs of the body and to model Christian love to the body and the community as well.

Therefore, a Deacon must be a serious, truthful, and temperate person with a good sense of priorities.

Someone who insists on the truth and knows how to defend the truth. They must be a spiritually successful person, with no habitual, unrepentant sin in their life.

IV. The effect of choosing good leaders.

Read *Acts 6:7*

So, what BENEFITS did the Church receive by calling Deacons
God's Word continued to spread because the Apostles
were no longer **encumbered** by this internal problem.

The work of the Deacons freed the Apostles to give their energy
to the study, teaching, and preaching of the Word of God.

The Church continued to grow "*The number of disciples
multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.*"

The Gospel spread even further, and more and more people came to Jesus, even some of the Jewish priests. Doing things God's way always leads to blessings.

The Sandhill Cranes I spoke of earlier don't have a choice in whether or not they follow the directions God gives them.

He stamps it into them by instinct. But for those of us who God trusts with His greatest treasures, we have a choice to serve.

The LORD doesn't force us to serve Him; He calls us.

God doesn't call the **qualified**; He qualifies the called!

The LORD doesn't drag us by force, but He calls us according to His grace and mercy.

The people who get appointed to be leaders in the body must have made choices in their lives to serve as models to the rest.

Their service here will be blessed if they continue to follow Christ and if the rest of the body supports them in the work that they are appointed to perform.

In the ***Book of Acts***, the Church was growing!

Responsibilities were multiplying along with the number of members within the Church.

So, as a recap, the qualifications for Deacons (**vs. 3**):

1. The first Deacons were BELIEVERS.
2. The first Deacons were REPUTABLE.

They were people "of good reputation." Both inside and outside the church, they were highly esteemed.

3. The first Deacons were SPIRIT-FILLED.

"Full of the Holy Spirit" means to be surrendered to or controlled by the Holy Spirit.

We need servants who will, as *Galatians 5:16* says, "*Walk in the Spirit...*" and "*not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*"

4. The first Deacons were WISE.

Wisdom is the ability to see a situation from God's point of view... will not act impulsively, but will use godly wisdom

5. The first Deacons were CAPABLE.

They were men who could handle this situation.

We also need capable Deacons who can be trusted with the responsibility of the ministry.

The LORD is giving us more ministry opportunities here at Living Faith, so we need more people willing to serve!

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2. The cranes chose leaders who can **handle** turbulence.
3. As the one bird is leading, the other cranes are honking with affirmation and **encouragement**.

The reason these birds can lead so efficiently is because they have the ability to **follow**.

- We must not neglect our widows, needy, or the weak.
- We must not neglect our missionaries or neglect our local outreach to this community.
- We must not neglect our worship or the quality of our services and facilities.
- We must not neglect the needs of our members, young or old
- We must not neglect our personal spiritual growth as individual members of Christ's body.

There are many things that the Lord's church is calling LFF to do, and these things are not just the Pastor's and staff's job; these are every member's responsibility.

They must be organized and administered by those who have wisdom and the Holy Spirit. God's Word calls us the body of Christ!

Individually, we are members of that body, and the LORD is building us up to Christ's fullness!