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Acts 6:1-7

Outward Church: Teamwork Makes The Dream Work

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Monica and I have a saying in our home, “**Teamwork makes the dream work.**” This isn’t a saying we created, but it’s something we like to say. So like when **Monica** is **cooking dinner** and I am **playing with Elijah** we’ll say, “Teamwork makes the dream work.” Or when I’m doing **dishes** and Monica is getting Elijah ready for **bed**, “Teamwork makes the dream work.” Or when Monica is **scrubbing the floor** and I’m playing **video games**, “Teamwork makes the dream work...”

I like this catch-phrase, “teamwork makes the dream work,” because it’s **short, catchy**, and has a **good message**. When we **work together, good things happen**. If the twelve Apostles had a catchphrase for our passage today, I’d like to think they could **appreciate**, “Teamwork makes the dream work.” At the start of the church, the Apostles face a challenge. The **Greek-speaking believing widows** are being **overlooked**.

Acts 6:1 (NIV) 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.

At that time like today **Jewish people** lived in Jerusalem and Judah, but also in **other parts** of the **world**. But when it came time to retire, many **Greek-speaking Jewish couples** would migrate to Jerusalem so they could be **buried there**. They would migrate, the husband typically would **die first**, and then there were all these widows left in Jerusalem.¹ The **Hellenistic Jews** spoke **Greek** and likely **embraced Greek culture** while **Hebraic Jews** spoke **semitic languages**, like **Hebrew** or **Arabic**, and embraced **Jewish culture**. So there are **cultural** and **linguistic barriers**. When the Christians were making the rounds to care for some of these women, they were not taking them the food they need, potentially because of **favoritism**. This is the **beginning** signs of the **ethnic tension** that would threaten the early church between the **Jews** and **Gentiles** (Acts 15). So the question is, “How are the Apostles going to make it work?”

As a church today we also **face challenges**. There are a lot of **responsibilities** and **duties** that go into running a **church**. Whose in **charge** of the church? Who runs **youth** ministry, **children’s** ministry, and **community** groups? Who counts the **money**? What do we **do** with the money? What do we do when someone **needs** something in our church? How about when we see **needs** in our **town**? What about **discipleship** and **evangelism**? Aren’t we **all** supposed to do that? Who takes care of what? It can all become **overwhelming** and lead to **burnout** as we do **too much** or the **wrong things**. Right now our whole normal way of **doing church** is on **pause**. Many people are **stepping up** to fill gaps we never knew we had, but it can still be **stressful**. How can we **handle** all God is calling us to? *Teamwork makes the dream work*. God **gifts each of us** with a **way** we can help **build up** the **church body**, not just **run the church**, but **really take care of each other** and **love each other** during this time.

Today, I **first** want to talk about **teamwork**. What type of team does the early church give us as an **example**? Second, I want to talk about the **dream**. What are we **hoping** will happen? So first...

1) Teamwork - Based on gifting and calling.

The Apostles, the twelve disciples, solve the problem of the Greek-speaking widows need through teamwork based on **gifting** and **calling**. The leaders of the church are specifically gifted by God (that means God gave

them certain **talents, abilities, and passions**) and called by God (that means God has set them aside for a **special task**) to **share God's word, pray, and empower the team**.

Acts 6:2-4 (NIV) So the Twelve 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. 3 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 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

While we don't have Apostles in our church, Elders fill a similar role at Cornerstone.

a. Elders preach, pray, and commission.

The twelve disciples say, "We can't neglect teaching God's word to wait on tables." It's not that helping the widows is a **bad thing**. It's a really **good thing**, but it's just **not their job** to do it. Instead, God is calling them to give their "attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." This ties into the **big-picture mission** Jesus gave the twelve disciples before he ascended into heaven.

Acts 1:8 (NIV) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Jesus wants his disciples to take the **good news** about his **death and resurrection** to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and all the way to the ends of the earth. In order to do that, they can't be the ones to fill that role, as important as serving meals is. It's as the **disciples fulfill this mission** to be **Christ's witnesses** and teach others about him that we see the **church grow**.

Acts 2:42, 47b (NIV) They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ...And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

There were other things this community did, like living in **fellowship**, and **loving each other**, but it **begins** with **knowing** and **growing in God's word**. But the twelve weren't just spending all their time inside a room talking to the same people. They got out into the **temple courtyards** and shared with people who did not yet believe in Jesus. They were **sharing the gospel** with **not-yet believers**. They were **evangelizing grace**.

Acts 5:42 (NIV) Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

This is why we as Elders need a **team**, so we can **all focus** on the **ways God** has **gifted** and **called** each of **us**. In fact, that's why you need a team too, so you can focus on the ways God has gifted and called you. He's gifted and called myself and the Elders to teaching, preaching, and evangelizing and that takes time to do (**not** every Elder **preaches** but every Elder teaches). Thank you for the ways you are supporting us, by living out your gifting. One of our Deacons **smashed a giant hole** in the **wall downstairs** in our church building to build a **doorway**. Do you know how long it would take me to do that? Probably about a year. I've heard of several others who have **made masks**. Do you know how long it would take me to make a mask and how poorly those masks would work? Others have **cooked** each other **meals**. I can make a **mean scrambled eggs**, but that's about it. God gifts and calls us in **different ways**. *Elders preach, pray, and commission. Teamwork makes the dream work.*

We **don't typically** think of **prayer as hard work**, but it is. To pray for the needs of our church body takes time and energy. It takes focus and dedication. God moves when we pray. There have been times at Cornerstone when I felt like we were **blocked** somehow from **going forward** to what God was calling us to. At first I tried to **figure it out—try this or try that** to get it right—and when I finally went through all the

options and none of them worked, I **prayed** and **God opened the way forward**. Maybe you've experienced that not just in ministry, but in a **relationship, situation** or in your **job**. You prayed for **reconciliation** and it happened or you prayed for a **new job** to open up and God opened it up. Sometimes God says **no** or **wait** but all the time **prayer has power**. Our **church leaders need time to pray**. I believe we're **all called to pray** but the Elders are **especially called**. Maybe you've heard the **catchphrase**, "**Couples that pray together stay together**." How about, "Churches that pray together stay together." *Teamwork makes the dream work! Elders preach, pray, and commission*. I want to talk about "commission" as I talk about Deacons.

b. Deacons care for the needs of the church body.

The apostles call their congregation together to choose seven people who can take care of the widows:

Acts 6:3, 5-6 (NIV) 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...

The twelve don't just choose people who are **able to meet their need**, they choose people who are **gifted and called** by God to the **task**. They choose people who are **full of the Holy Spirit**, who **follow his nudging**. These are the kind of people the twelve commission. To "**commission**" means to **give authority** to and **send out**. The apostles **give their authority** to the seven and **send them to work**.

5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

When we commission a team to go to **France**, or **Haiti**, or when we commission you for your **workplace**, typically the Elders and myself **lay hands on you, pray** for you, and **send you out** with the blessing of Cornerstone. That's what the twelve are doing here. They're saying they're **God's people** for the job.

All of these names are **Greek**.² The twelve choose people who can speak Greek and **relate** to the **Greek-speaking widows**. These seven are gifted by God for their special task. God has been **preparing them their whole lives**. Now God clearly calls them through the laying on of hands. Maybe you're wondering if you're called to ministry. One of the ways we know is when other **people** in the **church recognize God's gifting and calling** on our lives. **How might** he have **shaped you** for ministry? The only way the church can recognize your gifting and potential calling is if you **give things a try**. If you try it and we recognize your gifting, great! Keep doing it. If not, great! **Try something else**.

Our **Deacons** at Cornerstone fill a **similar type of role** as Stephen and the others. Our Deacons take care of the **physical and tangible needs** of the **church body** (people care, finances, buildings and grounds), so that our Elders can prioritize **teaching, praying, and discipleship**. But if you're not an Elder or Deacon, where do you fit in? Where can you be a part of the church body? *Elders preach, pray, and commission. Deacons care for the needs of the church body*. But **what about the rest of the team?**

c. Every member of the church body is gifted and called.

You don't have to be an Elder or Deacon to serve. God gives each of us a gift or gifts to serve the church body. The soon to be apostle, **Paul**, speaks of the ways God gifts and calls us.

1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 12 (NIV)

8 To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between

spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.

...12 Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.

The Bible uses the **illustration of a body**, with its many different **types** of **parts**, fitting together to make **one person**. That's kind of like the **church**. God made us each **unique** and **distinct** with **different gifts** and **abilities** and he puts us in the **same place**, the church, to **figure out how to work together**. I wanted to find an illustration of teamwork for today's message and I found one of **Steve Jobs**, the founder of **Apple Computers**, which illustrates this really well.

In 1986 Steve Jobs purchased **Pixar**, which went on to create films like **Toy Story**, **Monsters, Inc.**, **Finding Nemo**, and **Cars**. The article I found writes:

In 2000, he relocated the company to an abandoned Del Monte canning factory. The original plan called for three buildings, with separate offices for computer scientists, animators, and the Pixar executives. Jobs immediately scrapped it. Instead of three buildings, there was going to be a single vast space, with an atrium at its centre.

“The philosophy behind this design is that it’s good to put the most important function at the heart of the building. Well, what’s our most important function? It’s the interaction of our employees. That’s why Steve put a big empty space there. He wanted to create an open area for people to always be talking to each other.” – Ed Catmull, the president of Pixar.

But for Jobs, it was not just about creating a space: he needed to make people go there. The primary challenge for Pixar, as he saw it, was getting its different cultures to work together and collaborate.

Jobs saw separated offices as a design problem. He began with shifting the mailboxes to the atrium. He then moved the meeting rooms, the cafeteria, the coffee bar, and the gift shop to the centre of the building.

Brad Bird, the director of “The Incredibles” and “Ratatouille,” said, “The atrium initially might seem like a waste of space. But Steve realized that when people run into each other when they make eye contact, things happen.”³

I like this story because it illustrates how people of **different** skills—**computer scientists**, **animators**, and **executives**—when put in the same space, can **work together** to **create something amazing**. God puts a **whole congregation full of people** with different gifts and abilities together **every week** to make **something amazing**. We **worship** him and we create works of **art** as we **make music**, **teach**, **evangelize**, **serve** the **needy**, and **love one another**. Everyone matters. *Every member of the church body is gifted and called. Teamwork makes the dream work* (or in this case, “Teamwork makes the Pixar work...”).

Maybe you're called to **preaching**, **praying**, and **commissioning**, or maybe you're called to take care of the **needs** of the people. Maybe you're called to **something else entirely**. There are **five** different places in the Scripture that talk about gifting, and **each list is different** (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8-10, 28-30; Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 4:11). There are lots of ways God may have gifted you. Maybe he's gifted you with being really **friendly**, great! We'd love to have you call people in the **church directory** to **check in** on people and you can **greet them** when we finally get back to church. Maybe he's gifted you with **making good meals**. Great! You can make a meal for a **homebound family**. Maybe he's gifted you with **the ability to cut hair**. I know a lot of people who will desperately need you soon! I know of someone writing **encouragement cards** to the **entire church**. Great! If you don't know **where** to begin, **reach out**. We can **help you fit** in the church body.

During **covid-19**, we might be finding **new ways** we're gifted and called. Let's be **open** to whatever God is doing. Caring for each other **before** covid-19 might **look different** than it does **after** covid-19. There will certainly be **less handshaking**, which might be hard for some of us who have **perfected the lingering handshake**. When we're all functioning as **God intends**, with our gifts and callings, he does something amazing. **What** does teamwork do? *Teamwork makes the dream work*. First I wanted to talk about the team. Now I wanted talk about the dream.

2) The Dream - The vision God has given us to fulfill Christ's mission

Our dream as a church is the **vision God** has given us to help **fulfill the mission Jesus gave us**—for the gospel to go out to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the **ends of the earth**. What better way to accomplish that mission than through teamwork. When we work together, and we each function in our gifting and calling, God does something amazing. Look what happens in Acts.

Acts 6:7 (NIV) 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.

I read a book on prayer (*Old Paths, New Power*) that really highlights the priests coming to faith.

These Jewish priests were hard-liners, tough opponents of the gospel. The network of religious rivals who conspired to crucify Christ was now losing a significant number of its own ranks to a transformation found in the life of the resurrected Jesus. It would be like a modern-day salvation wave that engulfs some of the most notable atheists and critics of the faith in our day. Truly amazing. Truly God. Truly the way the Gospel ought to be.⁴

If we want to see the **gospel grow** in Westford and in our lives, the **solution isn't difficult**. *Teamwork makes the dream work*. If our **Elders** are **preaching, praying, and commissioning** and our **Deacons** are caring for the **needs of the church body**, and you are **using your gifting and listening to God's calling** on your life and **I do the same thing**, Lord willing, we will see people come to faith, even the **priests of our day**.

Teamwork makes the dream work.

The dream of the twelve and our dream at Cornerstone is that everyone would **know the love of Christ Jesus**. That everyone would get a chance to **hear and respond to the one who dreamed of us**. Before time began, **God dreamed of you**.

Ephesians 1:4a (NIV)

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

Before **time began**, God has a plan to make you **holy through Jesus**. God dreamed of our **repentance and faith in Jesus**. Part of that means learning who you are in Jesus, learning that you can **use your gifts** because **God loves you** enough to send his Son to **pay the penalty** for your **sin**. That means you **don't have to be afraid of trying out your gifts**. If God loves you, it doesn't matter if you **fail**. You're **forgiven and holy**. If you **succeed**, you can't have any **self-righteous pride**, because **God** is the one who **called you** in the **first place**. God called you **before the creation** of the **world** to be a part of **his church body**. It's really God working through us, it's **his teamwork** that makes **his dream work**. *Teamwork makes the dream work*.

Romans 15:13 (NIV) May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions

1. How are you gifted by God? If you don't know, what do others have to say?
2. How are you called by God? Calling ties into gifting. Has your church affirmed your calling? Have you giving your church the opportunity to see your gifting in action?
3. Why is preaching and praying so important?
4. When was the last time you were commissioned? How did it make you feel? Is there something you would like to be specially commissioned for?
5. "Teamwork makes the dream work." What's one way you can be a part of our team in a way that matches your gifting and God-given calling?

¹ Arnold, Clinton E.. *Acts* (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary) (p. 46). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

² NIV Zondervan Study Bible. Acts 6:5 footnote. Page 2227.

³ Merily Leis. 7 Stories That Prove The Importance of Teamwork. Accessed 5/17/20. <https://www.scoro.com/blog/teamwork-stories-importance-of-teamwork/>

⁴ Henderson, Daniel. *Old Paths, New Power: Awakening Your Church through Prayer and the Ministry of the Word* (pp. 15-16). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.