

# (Acts) the Priority of the Word

by Brian Brodersen

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*The apostles prioritize the ministry of the word and prayer over administrative tasks, emphasizing the importance of spiritual leadership in the church.*

**Duration:** 49:48

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Acts 5:1-11, Acts 6 - 7

**Topics:** "Prayer Ministry", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of giving oneself to prayer and the ministry of the word. He encourages individuals in various roles, such as deacons, bishops, and pastors, to prioritize prayer and studying the word of God. The speaker also highlights the need for organization and structuring as the church grows and more needs arise. He urges listeners not to settle or slow down in their spiritual journey, but to continue pressing toward the mark and seeking the high call of God. The sermon concludes with a reflection on the past year and a challenge to make a greater impact for the Lord in the coming year.

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## Transcript

We come now tonight to the sixth chapter of the book of Acts as we make our way through this great history of the early years of the church. And we read in verse one, and in those days, in those days, in the days when the spirit was moving powerfully and the church was filled with excitement and there was opposition as we have been considering, but yet the apostles were faithful to trust the Lord and just to press through the opposition and the spirit was being poured out and the church was growing. And so in those days, the number of disciples was multiplied.

So we don't know, you know, the scripture, interestingly, never gives us a head count. It never tells us how many people were in the churches, but it talks about the Lord adding to the church. And then we read about a little bit of subtracting as well with Ananias and Sapphira.

But then over and over again, Luke will mention the fact that believers were added or multiplied to the church. So again, it doesn't give us a specific number, but evidently many, many, many were coming to the Lord. Actually, at one point later on in the book of Acts, when Paul comes to Jerusalem, the Jewish leaders there, they will make reference to the myriad of Jews that believed and myriad is a sort of an indefinite number.

So tens of thousands there in Jerusalem itself. So God was moving powerfully and the church was growing. The number of the disciples was multiplied.

There arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations or the daily distribution. And so, as would be expected when a church is growing, you have growing pains. And now that more and more people are coming in and the simplicity of the church, although the apostles are holding on to the simplicity as something grows of necessity, things get a little more complicated just because you have more people and you've got more things to deal with.

And so we come now to really an introduction to some administrative ministry that developed in the early church up until this point. It's just been, you know, pretty much teaching and preaching and worshiping. And, you know, everybody's just gathering together just to seek the Lord and to have a, you know, just a blessed time.

But there isn't any real structure at this point. But yet, as things are growing and developing, more people coming in and more needs arising. Now there arises the need for some structuring for a bit of organization.

And so administrative gifts are needed at this point. Now, what had happened is that there was a perceived sort of discrimination going on, whether or not it was actually the case. I'm sure it wasn't intended, but it did seem that those Jews from the Hellenistic culture, at least to them, it seemed that they weren't being given the same kind of attention that the Jews from the Hebrew culture were given, and particularly those who were in distress, the widows and those who had need of help.

It seemed like there was preferential treatment going on, that those who, you know, came from that strong Hebrew culture, they were being preferred, while the Jews who had more of a Grecian cultural background, a Hellenistic background that they were being discriminated against. And there was among the Jews at the time, there was a bit of a division. There were those who had held tenaciously to the Hebrew culture.

They weren't just Jews, Bible believing Jews, but they held tenaciously to the Hebrew culture itself. Now, the Grecians or the Hellenists, as it's stated here, they were also Jews and they were believers, but they had embraced the Greek culture back at the time of Alexander the Great. One of the things that Alexander did is he spread the Greek culture throughout the world.

And so Greek became the common language of the day. And yet it was much more than a language thing. There was also a culture that went along with the Greek language.

And these particular Jews had embraced that, as did many of the Jews, because, of course, they were in what is known historically as the diaspora, which is the dispersion. And they were living out in this Greek world. And so they adopted the names of the Greeks.

They adopted the dress style of the Greeks. They just, you know, in many ways, adopted the Greek culture. And so because of that, there was some tension that existed.

And those who held tenaciously to the Hebrew culture did probably think themselves a bit more spiritual than those who had compromised in their mind with the Greek culture. So this is where the root of this dispute lies in this perceived neglect toward those from the Greek cultural background. So then the twelve called the multitude unto them and said, it is not reasonable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.

Therefore, brethren, look out from among you for seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. And so this whole matter was brought before the apostles, and they did the wisest thing that could have been done at that time, rather than they themselves laying out policy.

They just simply made a suggestion. They said, you know, we're going to need somebody to oversee this. This is a valid ministry.

There's a legitimate need. But it's not right that we should leave off the ministry of the word to do this sort of thing. Therefore, you, you be the ones to choose seven men and then we can appoint them over this.

You see, the wisdom they displayed was in giving the responsibility back to the people. You know, the church itself is. It's a body.

And a body is made up of many members, and each member has its part in its function, and we need to encourage the body to minister as much as we possibly can. A church begins to go in the wrong direction when all of the ministry is limited to just a handful of people. You know, in some churches, smaller churches, you have a church that's just entirely run by the pastor.

He does everything and nobody else, you know, is involved in anything. And it's just the whole thing is it's the pastor's deal. And then you've got other churches where it's there's the elders of the church and they run everything.

They do everything. And you have these different models that you can see, but the ideal fellowship is a fellowship where everyone is involved, where everyone is exercising their gifts, where everyone is finding that place of ministry that God has for them. And the only way that can really happen is if the leadership understands that that is how the church works.

It's when the leadership tries to hoard power that the church dies. It's then that the church fails. And so these guys were brilliant at this point.

You know, instead of saying, OK, you're right. You came to us. We're in charge here.

It's us 12. We're going to make all the decisions. They said, no, we're going to leave this with you.

And here's what we suggest. And then you take it and, you know, just go from there with it. That was a very wise move.

So they advised them to search out from among them seven men. And here's the requirements. They were to be of honest report.

They were to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. Now, these men were going to begin to function in what we would call the role of deacons in Paul's writings to Timothy and Titus. He talks about church government there and he talks about positions of leadership within the church.

And then he lays out the qualifications for the bishop. The bishop is the overseer or what we commonly call the pastor of the church. And he has the various list of requirements.

Therefore, the bishops and then he moves on from the bishops to the deacons. Now, the difference between those two roles is that the bishop's primary responsibility is to take the spiritual oversight of the

congregation. The deacons primary responsibility is that of the practical oversight of the congregation.

Now, having said that, it's important to realize that both positions will have a bit of a crossover into the other. In other words, a bishop, although his primary responsibility is a spiritual oversight of the congregation, it doesn't exclude him from taking practical oversight at times as well and being involved in serving in a practical way. And likewise, because of the requirement, the spiritual requirement for the deacons that Paul lays out there in first Timothy three, it becomes obvious that the deacons were not only to do administrative sort of things, but they were also to minister on a spiritual level, ministering the word.

And then, of course, the qualifications right here, I think, would imply that as well. There are to be men of honest report, people that you should be able to trust, that they were to be people full of the Holy Spirit and full of wisdom. And so although it doesn't specifically tell us that this is the origination of the office of the deacon, it does seem like this is where it all began.

You see, there was a practical need. There were the poor within the fellowship that needed to be ministered to. They needed to have a goods distributed to them.

And the apostles reasoned wisely, they said it wouldn't be right for us to leave off the word of God and to go do this, not because that wasn't important, but because the apostles were called to something else. And so they said, look for men that are called to this. Look for men who can take this as their ministry and they can put the same kind of energy into this that we're going to be putting in to the word.

Whenever we look for leadership in the church, in any kind of leadership, this is a good brief little list to consider here. Honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. We want people full of the Holy Spirit.

Now, what does that mean? A person full of the Holy Spirit, I think, is simply a person who is genuinely seeking the things of God, a person who is genuinely committed, a person who's following the Lord, serious about their relationship with the Lord. Sometimes when we even use the terminology, you know, to be full of the Holy Spirit in our minds, we get these ideas of people jumping around, shouting and, you know, getting all excited and maybe even giving some utterances and tongues and things like that. But when the Bible talks about those who are filled with the spirit, it's talking about those who were seeking God, those who the hand of God was upon, the power of God was manifest in their lives, the fruit of the spirit was overflowing from them.

There was that love and that joy and that peace and in all of those things, people who were genuinely believers is really the idea here. And whenever we look for leaders, those are the things that we're looking for primarily. We're looking for spiritual qualities in people's lives.

But, you know, unfortunately. In the church throughout its history and even down to this very day. You do often find.

That people are using the wrong standard by which to determine who the leaders ought to be, and this began to happen early on in the church. They began to look to those who were wise in this world. Oh, that's the people that we are.

Those are the people that we want. You know, we want those people that are recognized as as wise people or we want those people of influence. And so if somebody came into the church with that sort of a background, many times immediately they would be put into a position of authority or leadership because of their rank in the world.

Big mistake, major mistake. And that is what led to the corruption in the church that has come down to us even to this very day. The qualities that we look for in leaders are not the qualities that you would look for in the world per se.

But their spiritual qualities, you know, you can buy books on leadership and the seven laws of leadership and, you know, you can buy books on how to be a charismatic personality and how to get people to follow you. And, you know, you can go through that list of things and. Try to mold and shape yourself around that list that somebody gives you, thinking that, you know, this will make me a leader, but that's not what does it.

It's the Lord, it's being full of the Holy Spirit. That's the key for Christian leadership, being a person who is genuinely committed to God and seeking him and growing in him. You see, it's not the standard of the world.

A while back, a couple visited us here, and there are a couple that I knew years and years ago. I really hardly recognize them. I hadn't seen them in so long.

I knew them when they were high school kids and I used to do a Bible study at their house occasionally. And they, you know, came up and greeted me and we talked for a bit and then they proceeded to tell me about how they were ministering at a particular church. And I knew the church and I asked about the pastor and they said, oh, he's he's retired a couple years ago.

And I said, oh, well, who's the new pastor? They said, well, we haven't we haven't found one yet. And I said, wow, that's a long time to go without a pastor. And they said, yeah, you know, the there's a pastoral search board and there's a committee and they're having different people come through campaigning and they're looking for the ideal, you know, person to come along.

And and this particular person had been ministering at that church as an assistant for a few years now. And I said, well, I said, well, what about you? Aren't you a candidate? Why? Why don't they? I mean, you've been there, you know, the people and, you know, the people themselves are actually very open to such a thing. And he said, well, the pastoral search board, they want somebody with a master's degree and I only have a bachelor's degree.

And I thought, you know, that's that's so sad. But that is not uncommon at all. That is very, very common.

But you see, that's the the exact point that I'm making. That's completely the wrong thing to look for, because, you know, you could have a you could have one degree after another. But that's not what qualifies somebody for ministry.

And we have to always guard ourselves against adopting the world's standards and thinking that, you know, this is what we need, because, you know, if we get the world's recognition, then we're going to have more of an effect. We'll have more of an impact. But it's not true.

It's not true at all. The world is against the Lord for the most part, and believe me, your master's degree or your Ph.D. isn't going to convince somebody otherwise, unless they're ready to humble themselves before the Lord. You know, it's interesting what the thinks of that sort of thing.

There are many Christian scientists who hold to the creation model for origins rather than the evolutionary model. And although they've gone to secular universities, although they've, you know, attained their

degrees, their doctoral degrees and so forth, I'll tell you what the world thinks of them. The world wants to strip them of their degrees because they do not hold to the theory of evolution or in the world's eyes, the fact of evolution.

But instead, they they've embraced creationism, which in the mind of these particular people basically says they forfeited whatever degree they earned from us. There's actually an attempt to withdraw the degrees of these men who earned them just like anybody else did. But yet, because they don't tell the party line because they're not buying into the evolutionary nonsense, they want to strip them of their degrees.

So you see, my point is this, you know, sometimes we think, oh, well, if we just had our degree, then that would give us legitimacy. Then people would take us seriously. Then people would listen to us.

No, they won't, because it's not a matter of intellect. It's not a matter of education. It's a matter of the heart.

It's a matter of sin. It's a matter of rebellion. All of these so-called intellectual arguments against the faith, there aren't any.

When it all comes down to it, Huxley said it best in regard to evolution. He said we didn't embrace evolution because it seemed scientifically viable. We embraced it because.

It gave us freedom to live the way we wanted to live. And that's reality, so we have to be careful as we think about Christian leadership, we have to be looking for the right things, and that is people who are full of the Holy Spirit and full of the wisdom of God. Wisdom is such a glorious thing and such a needed thing in the ministry.

So many difficulties arise. And here we really see the apostles themselves, I think, exercising the height of wisdom when they said to them, you pick out seven men from among you. That was wise because it just sort of it it diffused the whole thing where it was a volatile situation.

It could have just gotten worse and worse, but they so wisely just put it back in their hands and it just diffused the whole thing. The whole tension that was there just relaxed because of that brilliant decision that they made their exercising godly wisdom and verse four. What a great verse.

But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. Now, this is. In a nutshell, the description of what those who are called to pastoral ministry are to occupy themselves with.

You see, that's why it's important in a ministry that you do have both pastors and deacons, because there is. Practical aspects to the ministry, there are those practical things that must be done, they have to be done, practical things regarding service to people. But in our day and age with church buildings and properties and all of those things, there's a lot of practical things that go into just, you know, making sure the facility is functional, making sure it's a nice place to gather and the air conditioners on when it's really hot or the you know, the heaters are on when it's really cold or whatever the case.

We need those kinds of gifts as well. But you see, the pastor or those who have that primary spiritual oversight, if they have to be taken up with all those other things, then obviously they're not going to be able to concentrate on what they're primarily called to do. And that's the word.

And so here the apostles, they set down here in the book of Acts, chapter six, verse four, they set down the standard and the priority for those who administer the word that their primary commitment is to be to two things, to prayer and the ministry of the word, prayer and the ministry of the word. That's what the pastoral ministry is all about praying for the work of God, praying for the people of God. Because, you know, sometimes people think, well, I need to talk to the pastor, but I can never get in touch with him.

He's too busy. They always say he's praying. That's a good thing if he's praying.

A lot of times they say, no, he's in a meeting. Oh, no, he's in a meeting. I call a lot of pastors.

They're always in meetings. I can never get through to any of them. But, you know, the reality is this.

We need prayer more than we need to talk to somebody most of the time. Not to say that we don't need to talk to people at times. We certainly do.

And that's where the ministry of the word comes in. But a lot of times. Those issues that you're struggling with, those things that are burdening you, if there are people praying for you, if your pastor is praying for you, that can many times go much further than anything else that that he could do for you.

I mean, even, you know, in the best case scenario, when somebody comes and we minister the word to them, there's still times when. OK, this is what God says, and they look at you like, well, isn't there anything else? I mean, come on, I still have my problem. Yes, you do.

But this is what God says, and we're going to pray. And I've found that lately quite a few times people are talking to me, pointing out things, and I'm just looking at them like, you know, I really don't know. Let's pray.

Let's let's call on God because God can do something about this. I can't. But he can.

But sometimes prayer is sort of downplayed. And people quite often say, well, you know, don't just pray, do something. There's there's a balance there, of course.

Sometimes people are praying when they ought to be doing something, but many times people are doing things when they ought to be praying. Because what they're doing is really not helping. It's just exercising a lot of energy without any result coming about.

So this is the priority. For those in pastoral ministry to be in prayer and to minister the word now in ministering the word, there's a lot of different things involved here. Some people in pastoral ministry have sort of limited the ministry of the word to just what happens from a pulpit.

And so they say, you know, look, I'm not here to do anything except pray and teach the Bible. Well, I think that's limiting here what is implied in ministry of the word. I don't think it's only that I do think it's that for sure.

You know, one of the great things and I'm sure you've experienced, I've experienced it many times, I hope you experience it when you come. But so often what happens is when you come to a meeting like we're at tonight, you might come here burdened, you might come here full of anxiety, but you might come here with questions, you might come here with doubts, you might come here with all this stuff. And maybe you even came thinking, man, I got to go up and talk to that guy afterwards tonight, you know, I really need some help.

But here's what happens wonderfully as you're sitting there listening. Suddenly, you find that the very things that are troubling you are being addressed and God starts speaking to you and the word that's being ministered is actually applying to your situation. And before it's all over, the burden has been lifted from you.

The question has been answered, the problem has been solved. And then you just get up and, you know, bounce out of here full of joy. You don't even have to come up and see me because the Lord ministered to you through his word.

That's the wonderful thing about the ministry of the word and teaching the word. In a church where the word is taught faithfully, undergirded by prayer, it shouldn't be a major counseling center. And, you know, counseling is not really what we do in in the traditional sense.

When you think of counseling, quite often you think in terms of psychological type of help and, you know, here lie down on the couch and we'll go through several sessions and get at, you know, what's bothering you. And but what we're really doing, we use the term counseling. And I think the world of psychology actually robbed it from the church because Jesus is a wonderful counselor.

But what we're really doing is we're just taking the word of God and applying it to your life situation. Now, that happens from a pulpit to a congregation of people. It also happens on an individual level.

And so I believe that included in ministry of the word here is ministering the word personally to people on a one to one basis in what we would commonly call a counseling situation. But what we're really doing is we're just carrying on the ministry of the word. It's just on an individual level rather than a collective level.

And that's what they were doing. That's what they said they would give themselves to. They said, OK, you find seven men that can take this practical aspect of the ministry.

It's an important thing. It needs to be done. But we've got to do this.

And so they laid down the the priority for all of us that would follow after them. And the same pleased the whole multitude. And so they chose seven men.

They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip and Prochorus and Nicanor and Timon and Parmenas and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch. So they chose these seven men. Notice that they all have one thing in common.

They all have Greek names. It would appear that they chose Hellenistic Jews to take the oversight of this ministry. In order to ensure, no doubt that there wouldn't be any discrimination against the Hellenist.

But of course, this could create a problem in the other direction. Now that only there's only Hellenistic Jews, what about them perhaps being biased toward the Hebrews? But yet, these men were of such reputation. They were men full of integrity that it seems everyone had absolute confidence that.

These were the right men for the ministry. Now, Stephen and Philip. Are two men that we're going to learn more about now, the rest of them.

This is all we hear of them. We know nothing more about them. And of course, that's not any big deal.

We have that in other people in the Bible as well. But as we go on in the story, Luke, the author, is going to highlight for us the ministry of these two men, the ministry of Stephen and the ministry of Philip. Now, just to give you a little sneak preview, Philip or Stephen is going to become the first martyr in the church.

But the thing that we're going to see in both of these men, and this is a point that I want to make, is that although they were called to this ministry of the deacon, which was, as I said, primarily a practical ministry. Taking care of the practical needs of the believers, we're going to see that they were both in their own right. Powerful, powerful evangelist.

They were both powerful witnesses for the Lord. And this is a point that I want to make. That the ministry is not limited to the guy standing in the pulpit teaching the Bible study.

But sometimes that's what we think. Some people are aspiring to be in the ministry and in their mind, that's to get behind a pulpit and teach the Bible. That's a good aspiration.

But just understand this. That's not all that the ministry is. And that, of course, is not a ministry for everybody.

That's a ministry for those that God calls to it. But every one of us are called to some type of ministry. And let me define the word ministry.

The word ministry means servant or service. The word minister means servant. The word deacon actually is the word simply means servant.

That's what it means. So the idea is that we are the servants of God. And we are going to look for any and every opportunity to serve the Lord.

But the Lord does have a specific area of service that we will do for him. But that doesn't exclude us from serving him in other areas as well. You see, these guys are going to serve specifically as deacons.

They're chosen to be deacons in the church, but they're still going to be evangelists. In other words, they're not saying, well, you know, I'm a deacon now. I don't I don't do evangelism anymore.

I just stand here and hand out food to these poor people. That'd be a drag of a ministry, I think. You see, that was the thing they were called to do at that point.

But there were other things. And we'll see that as we look at both of their lives. But we need to remember that, too.

You're in the ministry. Because as Paul said, whatever we do, do it with all of our hearts as to the Lord and not to men. And from the Lord, you will receive the reward of the inheritance.

You see, there are those designated ministries you might serve as a deacon. And by the way, there's the office of a deaconess as well. There's a mention of one woman named Phoebe in Romans 16, and she was the deaconess of the church in Centria.

So evidently, there were both men and women serving in that position as a deacon. She was serving the church in some way. And we all have those places and ministries and areas where we serve the church, but then we have the areas where we're serving the Lord as well, even when I'm not at church.

You know, if you're off working, let's say you're a schoolteacher or something, you're you're off there in your classroom. You're not serving the body of Christ at that moment, but you are serving the Lord. And there's work to be done for the Lord there.

Now, as you gather with God's people, whether it be here or in some other fellowship environment, there you have opportunities to serve the body, too. And I believe that God has for all of us his people. I believe that he has sort of both fields open to us.

I believe that he calls us all to have some service within the context of the body. And then he calls us to serve him out in the areas of our vocation, whatever that might be. The whole point is we're always serving the Lord.

And so these men, they were appointed to serve as deacons. But as we'll see, their ministry was considerably broader than that. So they gathered them together.

They set them before the apostles. And notice the order here. And when they had prayed.

They laid their hands on them. When they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. That's the order you find in the scripture.

Sometimes we sort of reverse that, we lay hands on people, then we pray. But the laying on of hands in this context here, and as you find it quite often in the epistles in the New Testament, the laying on of hands was a symbolic act of imparting the gifts of the spirit or the power of God to those individuals. And it could have been more than symbolic.

It could have been the actual impartation of the gift at that point. Paul, in writing to Timothy, he talked about the gift that was in him through the laying on of my hands, Paul said. So what they did, though, these seven men were chosen.

They were brought in before the apostles and then they prayed. And I believe that they were praying that the Lord would just confirm that these were the people that he had called. And as the confirmation came, however, that came, they all just, you know, seemed to sense that, yes, these men meet the qualifications.

Therefore, these are the right men. Then they laid hands on them. And that was the commissioning.

That was the impartation of of the power to to do that work, perhaps, or at least it was, if nothing else, it was symbolic of, you know, they were being given that authority by the church leaders. So they prayed and then they laid their hands on them. In choosing people to be in ministry, if you're ever in a position to do that, believe me, you want to pray about it.

You want to pray. I have. Foolishly.

At times. Just sort of encourage people into ministry without really praying about it. And it hasn't been good.

I've made some mistakes, but I've learned from those mistakes and now I just I don't want to do those kinds of things without going into it with a lot of prayer. You know, sometimes you can just think, oh, well, they seem like they'd be the right person. They look like they do a good job and they've got these talents and all.

Yeah, let's just throw them in there and see how it goes. And it's a disaster. I've had that happen.

Whenever we're thinking about people in any position of leadership, it's something we want to really pray about is something we want to really seek the Lord on. And God is faithful and he gives the confirmation. And so they laid their hands on them and the word of God.

Now, listen, this is the result of everything. And the word of God increased. And the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly.

So as a result of this wise move on the part of the apostles, they're not going to be taken away from the primary thing. Instead, they're going to pass ministry on to other people. That, in turn, led to the word of God increasing.

Passing ministry on to other people, that is what it's all about. And as you're here, as you've been involved in the church for a while, you need to be open to and praying about and seeking areas of ministry, because every one of us has a ministry appointment. You see, there's not to be anyone that just comes as a spectator.

Now, I think initially there's, of course, Paul gives instruction later to Timothy that a person is not to be a novice, a person that you put in leadership is not to be a brand new believer because they need to get their bearings about them. They need to get established. They need to get their roots sunk down a bit.

And that's legitimate. When I was pastoring in Vista, people used to come to the church and, you know, they'd be there maybe two or three weeks and they'd say, oh, I love this church. This is wonderful.

I want to be involved. I want to do something. What can I do? And I said, well, I said, you know, we have an unofficial policy and that's that you just come and sit here for six months and you just take in and receive from the Lord.

And then after six months, if you still feel the way you do right now, come back and talk to me and we'll see what the Lord might want to do. But I would often say to him, you know, you love it right now. You've only been here a couple of weeks.

I might say something a few weeks down the road and you decide I hate that guy. I'm getting out of this church. And if we put you in a place of leadership, it's going to be really you're going to have to pull you out of that.

It's going to be a big disaster. So, you know, I would tell him, be here and get familiar with the fellowship and make sure this is really where you want to sink down your roots and you want to plug in. And then if you still feel that way, we'll do that.

And I think that's. A pretty good policy after you've been some months in a fellowship and you feel like this is where I am and this is what I want to be part of, then you need to begin to seek the Lord about, OK, Lord, what do you have for me? Here at this church. But far too many people just spectate, they just come, they sit, they listen, they get up, they leave, they don't meet anybody, they don't get involved in anything.

And, you know, that's really a sad thing more than a bad thing. It's just sad because you're missing out on the whole point of what we're doing here. We're here as a body.

We're here as a as a family. We're here as as a gifted congregation of people that has something to offer to one another and to the body as a whole. And so when we get those things in the right order, as they did here, it just gives opportunity for the ministry to increase, for the ministry to grow.

And God has some ministry for you. He's got some things that he wants you to be involved in because he wants you to grow and he wants this fellowship to continue to grow. And it's through the giftings that he's given you and the impact that you're going to have that he's going to bring the increase about.

So you see, you got to plug in, you got to get involved, you got to step up and say, Lord, what do you have for me? And begin to seek him about that and he'll he'll direct you. And so the word of God increased the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly and a great company of the priest were also obedient to the faith. So the Lord is working powerfully and now even the priest.

The Levites, that whole group that was set apart for the temple ministry. There was just this powerful testimony that was going out and they were coming around as well, and many of them were coming to the Lord. Now, verse eight on through the end of the chapter tells us about Stephen and the difficulty that he encounters as he comes up against some of the Jews who are opposed to the work that's going on.

And we'll pick that up next time because it leads us into the seventh chapter, which is Stephen's pretty much his defense before the Sanhedrin is he's going to be brought before them and he's going to give his defense. He's going to give a powerful witness to the leaders of Israel once again, and they're going to respond to him very viciously, as we'll see. But we'll save that for our next study.

But as we close tonight, once again, whatever our particular calling is, I want to say this, giving ourselves whether we are deacons or bishops, pastors or in whatever other capacity we might be involved. Giving ourselves to prayer and the word as often as we can, that is wise advice for any one of us and every one of us, the more you can give yourself to prayer and the ministry of the word and going back just for a minute to the ministry of the word, something that I overlooked that I wanted to touch on, is that, of course, if you're going to teach the word, if you're going to minister the word, you've got to teach the word. You've got to study the word.

You've got to know it. You've got to yourself have a grip on it. And so give yourself as you think about serving the Lord.

And, you know, here we are on the last Saturday of the year 2002. And there's a whole new year ahead of us. Maybe you look back over this past year and you think, you know, what did I do for the Lord this year? Where have I been? You know, what what thing of eternal value can I look to from my efforts this past year? And maybe you look back and you're you're a bit disappointed in yourself.

Maybe you're thinking, you know, I haven't really done much for the Lord this year. I haven't done much to progress in the faith. You know what? Here's a great thing.

You can forget the past. You can leave it behind. You can get a fresh start.

You don't even have to wait till Wednesday. You can start tonight and you can make a fresh commitment and just say, you know, I am going to give myself continually to prayer in the word. I want to pray.

I want to study the word. I want to learn it so I can share it with other people. I want it to have an impact on my life.

I want it to change me. I want to become more like Jesus in this year to come. And I would encourage you to do that very thing.

Whatever this past year looks like, if you look back on it and it was a great year. Well, good. That's great.

But don't settle with I had a great year last year. You know, I think I'll slow down a little bit in the year to come. No, keep going.

As Paul said, pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high call of God. And give yourself to prayer, give yourself to the word and you will find that. The word of God, the life of God, the power of God will increase in your life.

And you know what you'll find, too, that the Lord will add to the body, the body will be enriched. The church will be enriched. The fellowship will grow and you will have made a contribution.

Let's do that as we look at this new year coming. Let's pray. Father, we thank you, Lord, that you've called us to be your servants.

And Lord, that each and every one of us have an area of service to the body. Each and every one of us have a life to live for your glory. And Lord, as we look at this development here in the early church and we see the wisdom of the apostles and we see the priorities that were set out.

Lord, whether we're called to be deacons or pastors. Or deaconesses or whatever. Lord, may we commit ourselves to you.

Entirely so that you could do in us and with us and through us all that's in your heart to do, Lord. And as we look back over this past year. Some of us look back with sort of a mixed feeling about it, Lord, we can see some good things and some bad and.

Some look back and just feel like it was sort of a wasted year. And some feel like it was a good year, Lord, and whatever the case. We thank you, Lord, that we can have a fresh start with you tonight.

And so help us now. Help us, Lord. With a fresh commitment to prayer and the word for the year to come.

And through that, Lord. May the word of God increase. And may the number of disciples be multiplied.

Here we pray in Jesus name. Amen.

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