

December 15, 2019

Impact through Serving - What is Your One Pursuit?

Acts 6:1-7

Intro:

“The Name of Jesus Christ, my King! What a beautiful Name it is, nothing compares to this! What a beautiful Name it is, The Name of Jesus!” I’m so thankful that God has allowed me to speak that precious name, and to call on that precious Name and to know the Savior who belongs to that precious name! Someday every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord! But for today, you and I have a choice! We can choose to confess Jesus as our personal Savior or not! We can choose to invest in making Him our one priority, or not! We can choose to identify one person to share His love with, or not! We can choose to impact our world through service by pursuing one thing: His purpose for our lives...or not! Make no mistake about it, God wants to send a spiritual awakening and renewal through revival, but we have to want it! God has elected to love us, the question is will we elect to love Him back? The most important election in 2020 is not presidential, it is spiritual! Let’s pray!

As I said, we have some important choices to make in 2020, and you don’t have to wait 16 days to make those choices! You can make the choice today to Invest in your relationship with God, Identify one person you can help come to know Christ and you can choose to make an impact through pursuing your God-given calling. The New Testament Church had some major decisions to make as well. Let’s read our text, Acts 6:1-7 and I think you’ll be able to see the connection.

Acts 6:1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

Acts 6:2 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.

Acts 6:3 Brothers, 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

Acts 6:4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.“

Acts 6:5 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.

Acts 6:6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

Acts 6:7 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.

New Testament Church Issues

Issue #1 - Widows were being overlooked in the distribution of food

Issue #2 - There were underlying issues of prejudice (Grecian vs Hebraic)

Issue #3 - The apostles were trying to do it all and as a result they were neglecting other vital responsibilities

New Testament Church Solutions

Choose Godly men to help!

Allow the apostles to spend a majority of their time in prayer and study of the word!

New Testament Results

The Word of God spread!

The number of disciples increased rapidly!

Even some of the priest turned their lives over to Christ!

Northshore Church Issues

Can I be honest with you? We are so thankful people are coming to church and the number of folks in worship is such a blessing! We know that life is so busy and there are many other places you could be besides here. So we're excited you've decided to invest in your relationship with God on Sunday mornings. We also know that there are millions of things screaming for your time the other 6 days of the week. But here's a truth we are painfully aware of: Many people are not getting plugged into the family. Simple as that. We've had numerous people who have come for months, yet have never gotten connected. This is tragic and sad and here's why:

People have ministry needs that are being unmet either because we don't know about the needs or the staff can't get to everyone who has a need. If you only come on Sunday morning and are not a part of any small group or ministry, then we have no way of knowing when there is a need. And, while we are blessed with a great staff, we could never hire enough staff members to meet all the needs that exist in our church and community.

And if our staff tries to meet all the needs, then there won't be any time left for prayer and study of the Word, and leading ministries! Same issue the Apostles were having. Notice, I said "if we try to meet all the needs." Ministry is what God has called us to do, and we'll always seek to minister to each of you, but we must not neglect the fact that a huge part of our ministry as a staff is to teach you to do ministry: to teach you to meet needs. It stands to reason if we aren't doing ministry, then we won't be able to teach you to do ministry! So we should always be doing ministry, but we have to realize a huge part of our job is to help you find your One Pursuit! Your ministry calling! Your ministry gift! Your ministry contribution to the body of Christ! Here's the way God's Word puts it...

This takes us to the solution part of our message for today. Remember the New Testament Church had issues, but it found solutions.

Solution One: Equip the saints to find their One Pursuit!

Ephesians 4:11-15

Eph 4:11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,

Eph 4:12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...

"To prepare God's people for works of service!" You have unique gifts to bring to the table, and God wants you to discover those gifts and to use those gifts. Just because you don't have the gift of teaching, or singing, or playing a musical instrument, or a calling to work with the children in shore kids, that doesn't mean you don't have a place or a calling in God's Kingdom! Paul put it this way to the Church at Corinth...

1 Cor 12:12 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.

1 Cor 12:13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

1 Cor 12:14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.

1 Cor 12:15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.

1 Cor 12:16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body.

1 Cor 12:17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?

1 Cor 12:18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

1 Cor 12:19 If they were all one part, where would the body be?

1 Cor 12:20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

1 Cor 12:21 The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"

In other words, we need each other and we need all of us working together, pursuing our gifts to impact our community and our world! You might say, "I just don't know how to even begin discovering my spiritual gifts!" It's not as hard as you might think! If you begin investing in your relationship with God by making Him your one priority, I believe He will open your eyes to see your gifts! Listen to what God's Word says in the Psalms...

Psa 37:3 Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.

Psa 37:4 Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psa 37:5 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:

Psa 37:6 He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

Psa 37:7 Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him...

Trust the Lord and just start doing good things. And if you are finding your greatest delight and joy in your relationship with the Lord, because you're investing in that relationship, then I believe God will give your heart the right desires. In the Hebrew language that verse can be translated two ways: Delight yourself in the LORD and He will give you the desires of your heart, or Delight yourself in the LORD and He will give your heart it's desires! If He is your one priority, then I believe He will give your heart the right desires, and if your heart has the right desires, then I believe God will give you the desires of your heart! Just makes sense. In other words, you can pursue the desires of your heart if you know God put them there!!!

A part of discovering those gifts of service and being trained to use them takes place when we come to worship! We worship together and we learn together! In doing so we begin to pursue using our God given gifts! The writer of Hebrews put it this way...

Heb 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Heb 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

It's so important to worship together and encourage one another on Sundays, but it is equally important that we become unified in using our unique gifts to pursue our mission to transform worship, people and the world every day of the week!

Solution Two: Get everyone connected so they can use their One Pursuit to serve!

Paul went on to say

Eph 4:13 until we all reach unity in the faith

God wants us to be together! Revival from God will not be a lone ranger, super hero event, it will be an event that happens when we come together as one, realizing our dependence on God and on each other! Even Jesus gathered twelve disciples around Him and trained them and desired for them to become unified in their mission and pursuits! Even Jesus knew He needed the disciples to use their gifts to build His kingdom! He knew His job on this earth was about to be finished, and that the sharing of the Good News was going to be left in the hands of His disciples and the ones they would reach, and the ones they would reach, and the ones they would reach, all the way down to me and you! Not long before Jesus left this world He prayed for His disciples and for us! Listen...

John 17:16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.

John 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

John 17:18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.

John 17:19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

John 17:20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,

John 17:21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

John 17:22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:

John 17:23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Jesus' prayer was answered in a great way in Acts 2:46ff...

Acts 2:46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

Acts 2:47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

How did this happen? God was their one priority and they began reaching their friends and neighbors, and began pursuing their spiritual gifts and using them for God's Glory! They overlooked their racial prejudice and reached both Jews and Gentiles regardless of the color of their skin! Let's not overlook anyone! Let's let people know they are welcome in this family! Let's make it our goal that every single person who comes to worship at Northshore Church will eventually get connected to the family! Let's pray they turn from their sins, receive Jesus as their Savior and begin investing in their relationship with God, allowing Him to be their Lord and that they will desire to share with some one the good news they've found, and that they will begin pursuing their calling from God and using their gifts and talents to build God's Kingdom! Because the New Testament Church met in each other's homes and began building relationships with each other, they discovered needs and ministry opportunities and began using their God-given abilities to minister to the Body of Christ. Listen to this passage...

1 Pet 4:8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

1 Pet 4:9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

1 Pet 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

1 Pet 4:11 If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Solution Three: Teach People How Personal Spiritual Growth Will Aid Their One Pursuit

Paul continued his instructions to the church in Ephesians 4:13-15

Eph 4:13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Eph 4:14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

Eph 4:15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ

We are committed to providing growth opportunities for each of you in 2020.

Worship Services that touch the heart of God and transform the hearts of His people!

Children's ministry that is age appropriate and yet challenges our children to want to know God and grow in their relationship with Him!

Youth worship and discipleship opportunities to help them become the up and coming leaders of our church!

Community groups (This year focusing on our 260 Bible Reading Plan to read and learn God's Word)

Additional Bible Study Groups (In-depth Bible studies for men and women, and other ministries like Grief Share)

Mission opportunities - We have two mission trips planned abroad, and there will be local opportunities as well through some of our ministry partners. I'll be talking to one of them tomorrow!

And don't forget we're getting ready to launch our counseling center, probably in March or early April. Super excited!

But you have to remember this very important fact:

We can't provide everything you need for your spiritual growth or pursuing your spiritual gifts! You've got to take personal responsibility for these things. You see, if God is not your One Priority, and if you aren't willing to Reach your One, and if you don't have a passion to pursue how you can impact your world for Jesus Christ, then there's nothing we can say or do that will make a lasting difference! It's kind of like with your children, once they are no longer children. Sometimes you wish you could make decisions for them, but you can't, it has to be their decision! I can't tell you how many times I wish I could make decisions for people, but I can't. I can only give them God's wisdom and instruction, but it's up to them to follow God! You see, you need to continue in your personal spiritual growth to the point that you are personally involved in ministry at some level. And what I'm about to tell you may surprise you! This doesn't necessarily mean you will serve in a ministry position within the organization of the church. God may call you to start a Bible Study at your place of work, or on your college campus, or even your high school campus, or in your community! We used to talk about the Northshore Church process. It was originally four things... Come to worship, Connect to a small group, Commit to spiritual growth and Contribute to the Mission. And that last part was not talking about tithing, but about finding your spiritual gift, and pursuing that gift to serve the Lord and His mission. Folks, if we do this we will accomplish what Paul was talking about in Ephesians 4:15...

Eph 4:15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Notice it said we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. Christ is the head of the Church, His Body, and we are His hands and feet that serve in His Name! We are to show the world His very heart by the way we love each other and by the way we love those who are lost. We don't compromise His truth, or water down the principles of His Word, but we love everybody and let them know God's ways are truly the best ways! God's ways are the only way to real joy, meaning and purpose in life! And we are to let people see the hope we have found in Christ for eternity! Peter put it this way...

1 Pet 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. 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,

1 Pet 3:16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

1 Pet 3:17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

So don't wait for us, take personal responsibility for your spiritual growth! Don't wait for Sundays! Worship a little everyday! Spend a little time each day in prayer and in the Word!

Attend a community group during the week for extra special fellowship and discussion on how to apply the principles you learned on Sunday to your daily life! And begin pursuing your God-given giftedness to make an impact on your world! If we do this then we might just see some of the same kind of results they saw in the New Testament.

Northshore Church results will be like the New Testament Church...

The Word of God will spread!

The number of disciples will grow rapidly!

And folks we never thought would come to know Jesus will be transformed!

How do I know these things will happen? Because God can bless us when we are unified around His Word, His Spirit, His Purpose, and are fulfilling Jesus' prayer that we become one in unity!

Let me end with a concept I learned when I was working on my doctorate in leadership and some Scripture to back up my thoughts.

Have you ever heard of the word...

Synergy

According to Pat MacMillian who wrote a book on teamwork...

“Synergy is the state in which the output is greater than the sum of the inputs. One plus one equals three, four, even five!” (MacMillian - The Performance Factor: Unlocking the Secrets of Teamwork)

Other authors have defined it this way...

“The whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (Syer and Connolly - How Teamwork Works)

Two people working together can do more than two people working apart

Before the days of tractor pulls, there were Mule team pulls – In the 1885 World Series Mule Team Competition the 1st place team pulled 9,000 pounds. The 2nd place team pulled a little less. Together, however, they pulled over 30,000 pounds. Over 12,000 more than the sum total of their two teams. That’s Synergy at work! (MacMillian - The Performance Factor: Unlocking the Secrets of Teamwork)

What does it take for the Body of Christ to function as a team? We must “Be Completely Humble!” No showboating lone rangers. Paul gives us the following wisdom on our pursuit to make an impact, found in Philippians and Romans...

Phil 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Rom 12:4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,

Rom 12:5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Rom 12:6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith.

Rom 12:7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach;

Rom 12:8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Rom 12:9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

Rom 12:10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

Rom 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Let’s pray!