

Acts 6:7
Mission and Discipleship
September 22, 2019

Intro: Last week I preached on Acts 1, focusing on 1:8. Some may be scratching their heads wondering why we jumped to Acts 6:7.

- First, we are not skipping over the others; this is the last verse of the series and it gives an overall theme.

1. Acts 1:8 can be seen as a purpose statement for all of Acts.
2. Acts 6:7 can be seen as God blessing the Spirit-empowered efforts of his church. The book of Acts can be read as God's vindication of the early church.
3. Acts 6:7 describes the church in a place of health (also 12:24; 19:20).

**A healthy church is used by God to spread his Word, multiply disciples, and win converts to Christ.

+Content—Word of God increases (think parable of the soils, Lk 8:8)

+Conformity— (Christlike disciples are made and multiply)

+Conversion— (obedient to the faith)

*priests (many who may have been Sadducees, shows the remarkable nature of conversion “unlikely converts”—and fulfillment of law and temple, ties into Stephen's preaching next)

- Acts 6:7 happens when there is a *shared purpose*.
- Often, even well-meaning church bodies can fall into a fragmented practice like the Judges where “everyone does what is right in his own eyes” (Jdgs 21:25).
- One commentator, Dennis Johnson, notes another problem.... “Churches often drift off to sleep” (The Message of Acts)

**This is why we need to hear the Spirit speak from Acts. We are inclined to either *distraction* or *drifting* off to sleep.

This message is about laying out the *purpose* of the church. Why do we as TRB exist? What is God uniquely calling us to do? What is God calling us to focus on? How can we avoid distraction and falling asleep in the hour? So that we will focus mission.

- I do feel it necessary to lay out an initial justification for a mission statement. I find that biblically conservative Reformed Christians sometimes turn their noses. They either think casting vision is too much like corporate America or John Maxwell.
- I get it because I get uneasy with a lot of it. The church is not called to mirror the corporate world; there is a lot of leadership material that is Christian but man-centered and manipulated.
- I've found support from Paul and John .

Paul was a man of vision and purpose—no distraction and falling asleep on his watch.

- 2 Tim 3:10— “aim in life” – “¹⁰You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life”.
- Col 1:28—²⁸Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. (Very close to a purpose-vision statement)
- Rom 15:20-21—
“²⁰and thus I make it *my ambition* to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation,”
- Also, God-centered pastors have promoted having a shared purpose.

John Piper (Letter to his church in 1983) -

“I think, as a pastoral staff and a body of believers, we need to articulate as clearly and concisely as possible *why we exist* as a group and *how we are different from other groups in our society*. Then we need to take this statement of mission and think through how each of our meetings and programs relates to it, until we can give an accounting to anyone for why we do what we do.

When you feel a sense of clearly defined identity and purpose, your life takes on new meaning. If every member could state clearly and simply why we exist as a church and could see how all the parts of our church life grow out of that mission, there would be a new intensity about all we do. Every member would feel the heart of our cause. Every member would see what makes us tick. And everyone could see ways to work out his or her own special contribution. It is a thrilling thing to watch an army respond when they all know the bugle sound and what it means.

**Here is a church leader who shares our similar convictions and says: a clearly articulated vision communicated and lived out gives meaning, purpose, intensity to our work. This is not just for leaders, but every member needs to own it also.

TRB Vision:

We exist to glorify God by being and making disciples of Jesus Christ, both locally and globally, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let's look at the main parts - what marks it.

#glorifying God

- 1 Cor 10:31—"31 So, whether you eat or drink, or *whatever you do*, do all to the glory of God."
*God's glory needs to be our chief motive in all we do. He blesses what is done for his glory.
- Ps 115:1—"Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory,
for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!"

The glory of God is so critical since it keeps us from trying to make a name for ourselves.

- Eph 3:20-21—
"20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen"

Apply: I love this verse, and so do some people who started this church since it's etched on stone. God does and continues to do things that amaze us. *It says we should not think small if we have faith.* But it is all for his glory.

May the glory of God not just be etched on a stone outside of our church, but etched in our hearts and lives.

#growing discipleship

- First, we know how important discipleship is to the Lord Jesus (Mt 28:19). It's not something we pull out of thin air, or just looks good on paper. *It's what Jesus left for us to do.*

What is a disciple? (The word is used about 260 times depending on translation—almost exclusively in Gospel & Acts)

—A disciple is *called* by Christ and *converted* by the Spirit (rich, poor, male, female...Jesus plays no favorites)

—A disciple counts the *cost*. There is a break from the old way of life (repentance).

—A disciple is *committed*. Discipleship is playing the long game, it's a way of life (obedient to the faith)

Disciples have a few aims.

1. Maturity in Christ—Christoformity (being conformed into the image of Christ) Col 1:28
2. Modeling— (1 Cor 11:1) “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

**It's important to emphasize that we make disciples of Christ—*not clones of us*. Our discipleship is only lasting if there is Christoformity.

Notice that discipleship is not just what a person teaches, it is what they do...it's how they live. Discipleship is often just as much caught as it is taught.

3. Multiplying; reproduction— (Acts 6:7)

#geography

- Locally & globally reflects the pattern in Acts 1:8.
- There are actually two sides of locally:

1. I'm thinking of the local church to begin with. *The local church is the main place where disciples are made.* The local church is set up for this.

(Titus 1:5)

“⁵This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.”

2. We are called to be disciple makers in our community. This prompts us to be very intentional with outreach and evangelism. *Evangelism is the call to discipleship. It's a call to follow Jesus—calling to call family, friends, and neighbors to follow Jesus.

- Finally, there is the global aspect of mission. Jesus tells his church to go to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

This is nothing new to TRB.

“Our purpose for mission is to glorify God in obedience to Jesus Christ and complete the Great Commission by strategically crossing cultural barriers with the Gospel in order to establish the Church among all peoples.”

**Since churches make disciples, discipleship is at the heart of global mission also. Our sent ones don't just care for human needs, but human souls.

Application:

A healthy view and practice of discipleship —we work for God's word to spread in the Midlands, but also mobilize to reach the ends of the earth. We want to be intentionally faithful to both our *neighbors*, and the *nations*.

#grace

- Salvation is a total gift of free grace (Eph 2:8). All believers believe that.
- But we sometimes forget that our service is fueled by the same God of grace.
- “In the power of the Holy Spirit” orients us to God's grace. It's not our efforts, but his grace working through us.
- Humble reliance is the means. This is true in anything we do for God.
- Jn 15:4-5—
⁴Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, *for apart from me you can do nothing.*”

*****That's enough to be a philosophy of ministry statement—apart from Christ we can do nothing!***

- 1 Cor 3:5-7—⁶I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.”
- Ps 127:1-2—

¹Unless the Lord builds the house,

those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the Lord watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.

² It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep.

Application:

Let's never forget that without Christ we are nothing and can do nothing. God is the builder; we are merely servants. We can serve confidently, not in restless anxiety, but in the strength of grace. Christ will build his church.

Conclusion:

Illustration: Let me also share an experience that shaped me. I came to saving faith in Christ in a non-denominational church in the mid 90's. It was a church that had a lot of numerical growth. I got to know the pastor decently well. Now the church probably had close to 1,000 who attended every week. I knew as a newer Christian I needed some help in my growth. So, one day I asked the senior pastor if there was a mature, older Christian man who could mentor me. *I want to be a disciple—I just needed a guide.* He paused for a second and said: "Ryan all the guys that come to mind are already too busy serving in other areas, I just don't know if they would have the extra time".

I was discouraged and I do think that my spiritual growth was stunted. I also realized that church size does not matter. Buildings, bodies, and a fat budget does not mean discipleship is happening or will happen.

I shared this with our elders, and one brother also said: by not having a discipleship plan in place, *it also robbed the man who could have invested...it robbed him of the joy and honor of being used by Christ.*

Main takeaway: Discipleship needs to be a matter of priority.

Churches can do dozens of things and do them well...*but if a church misses discipleship, it misses so much.*

Gallaty quote here:

“When the church becomes an end in itself, it ends. When Sunday school, as great as it is, becomes an end in itself, it ends. When small groups ministry becomes an end in itself, it ends. When the worship service becomes an end in itself, it ends. What we need is for discipleship to become the goal, Every disciple must make disciples.”— ***Robby Gallaty, Growing Up: How to Be a Disciple Who Makes Disciples***

May God help us—to be and make disciples of Jesus Christ locally and globally. May he guide us, give us a zeal and intensity. May we see him do abundantly more than we can ask or think. And all for his glory and our joy.