Leadership Session

Pastor Bernard

Growing and Guarding

• Leadership Session

Growing the church while guarding the gaps

KEY PASSAGE

Acts 6:1-7

with EXODUS 18 and NEHEMIAH 4

The church in Acts 6 was not failing; it was multiplying. And in those very days of increase, some people were being overlooked. We are growing too, and things are good in so many ways. The danger for us is ***a growing church can be asymptomatic***, healthy on Sunday while someone is quietly being missed.

• The Question

The question is not, are there gaps?
As we grow, there will be gaps.
The question is, can we address them before they become neglect?

1 Growth Creates Gaps

The Bible says the gap came “when the number of the disciples was multiplied.” It was caused by success, not failure. “Neglected” means to look past in this passage. Nobody refused the widows; no one was positioned to see them. “As an assembly grows, it must become more intentional about providing for the needs of everyone and not overlooking anyone” **(Growing a Church, p. 82)**.

And in those days, when 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 ministration.

Acts 6:1 KJV

Food for thought

There is no growing church without gaps, only one that has found them and one that has not found them yet.

2 Discovery by Complaint

The apostles found the gap through murmuring. A complaint is the last sign of a problem, not the first; by then the gap has existed for a while. Notice who was missed: the widows, less connected, not drawing attention. Gaps form first at the edges. Moses was faithful and busy and still could not see his gap until Jethro stepped back and watched.

Moses’ father-in-law replied, “What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.”

Exodus 18:17–18 NIV

Food for thought

A healthy and growing season is the best time to look for gaps, because you can close them before anyone is hurt.

3 Not “Too Good to Serve,” but “Not Enough to Do Both”

The apostles were not saying tables were beneath them. The gap had grown so large they would have had to choose one or the other. Instead, they refused the false choice and added people. They stayed focused on the Word and prayer AND the widows were served.

Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

Acts 6:3–4 KJV

Food for thought

When a gap forces a choice between two good things, the answer is usually more people, not less of either. You have to answer the question: what has God called me to do that ONLY I can do right now?

4 Who Is Identifying and Guarding the Gaps?

As Nehemiah's wall grew, the builders were "separated upon the wall, one far from another." No one could see every section, so whoever saw trouble sounded the trumpet. At the low, exposed places, Nehemiah set the people "after their families" (4:13). Households guarded the gaps. That is our leadership couples: a husband and wife watching a section of the church, finding the gap, and sounding the trumpet.

> *The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us.*
>
> Nehemiah 4:19–20 KJV

Food for thought

Every leader is a set of eyes for the pastor. A gap with a name assigned to it is a gap that gets watched.

5 Under the Pastor, Not Separate

The apostles did not hand off the widows and walk away; they prayed and laid hands on the seven. In Exodus 18, every great matter still came to Moses. Empowering leaders to care for people does not replace or undermine the pastor, but assists. We need to create a culture where people **receive leaders as representing the pastor.**

> *He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.*
>
> Matthew 10:40 KJV

Where Are Our Gaps?

AREA	EARLY WARNING SIGN (BEFORE A COMPLAINT)	WHO IS GUARDING IT?

FIRST CHURCH

STERLING HEIGHTS

Find the gap before it becomes neglect.

Sources: David K. Bernard, *Growing a Church*, p. 82 (PDF edition). Scripture KJV unless noted.