Helpers in the Church



Scripture Reference: Acts 6:1-7

Suggested Theme: Christians use their various gifts to help when needed. Who are the leaders and helpers at my church?

Memory Verse: “Each of you received a spiritual gift. God has shown you His grace in giving you different gifts. And you are like servants who are responsible for using God’s gifts. So be good servants and use your gifts to serve each other.” 1 Peter 4:10, ICB

Story Overview:

Many Jews were becoming followers of Jesus in Jerusalem. Needy widows were given food daily, but some were left out. Instead of neglecting their teaching and preaching time to address this food problem, the Apostles asked the Christians to choose seven faithful men to care for the widows and serve the church in this way.

Background Study:

Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts

Much organisational work happens behind the scenes when it comes to large groups of people. If it were not for the humble servants who attended to details and helped things run smoothly, the disorder and frustrations would mean no one could use their gifts and serve others as well as they should. The apostles and early Christians faced this challenge.

The church began in Jerusalem and was made up of Jews who had gathered there for the Passover and feast of Pentecost and those from the local area. As they turned to Christ, the number of Christians multiplied quickly to thousands of people. Although these were all Jews, there was diversity among them.

The “Greek-speaking followers” were Jews who had not always called the Jerusalem area their home. The language spoken by Jews who lived in the local regions was Aramaic, so the “Greek-speaking followers” were probably looked upon as outsiders in many ways.

A problem arose among two groups concerning food that was being distributed to widows in need of help. The disagreement was not over whether widows should be fed. They would all agree on that. Widows have always been special to God; God’s people have always been asked to look out for their needs (Deuteronomy 10:18; 24:19-21; 26:12-13, 27:19; Psalm 68:5; Luke 7:11-17). Later in Church history, more specific guidelines were provided regarding looking after widows. (See 1 Timothy 5:3-16)

For some reason (intentional or not), the Greek-speaking widows were overlooked when food was being distributed. An argument arose between the groups.

Jesus had commissioned the Apostles to preach and teach, so they knew it would not be right for them to be distracted by other issues, no matter how important they might be. They gathered the followers together

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to work out a solution to this important situation.

The Apostles instructed the group to choose seven spiritual men to ensure these widows' needs were met. By delegating this responsibility, needs would be met, and the good news of Jesus could continue to spread.

This decision indicates wisdom on the part of the Apostles and is the first time we see any sign of a formalised organisation in the early church. Structure and organisation are vital to meeting the needs of a large group. In other places in Scripture, the Church is referred to as a body (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12,27; Ephesians 3:6; 4:15-16). The metaphor of the body reveals God's plan for us to use our different gifts for His purposes, together meeting all the needs around us and fulfilling the Great Commission. The Apostles could not continue to meet the needs of the expanding church on their own. They needed help. Organisation and delegation meant that those needs could be met.

Later, as the church grew and moved beyond its beginnings in Jerusalem, helper roles became more defined. Paul gives details in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9 about how to appoint overseers and deacons. The word "deacon" comes from the Greek "diakonos, " meaning servant or minister.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Before the teaching session, find out the names of the congregation's widows (and widowers, which is a man whose wife has died). Write the names on the chalkboard (or whiteboard). Ask the children what all of these names have in common. See if the children eventually realise that the people listed are all widows/widowers.

Now, begin a new list. Write the names of the deacons or other helpers in your church. Ask the children if they know what these people have in common. "Today, we are going to read from the Book of Acts about both widows and helpers."

The Story:

The church in Jerusalem grew bigger and bigger every day. People heard about Jesus and then told other people. Soon, hundreds and hundreds and even thousands of people decided to follow Jesus and were baptised.

The Apostles were very busy praying, preaching and teaching every day. They wanted everyone to know about Jesus!

But they were also very busy helping people. Christians brought money to the Apostles, who, in turn, would buy food and give it to those who were hungry. This was very important because some people had no family to care for them. One group of people who didn't have a family were the widows. A widow is a woman whose husband has died. The Apostles gave food to the widows to help them.

But there was a problem. The Apostles were so busy that sometimes they couldn't get to everyone. Some widows were missing out and going hungry. The Jews that had travelled from far away said, "The widows in our group are not getting enough food! The other widows are getting the food first."

Many people were unhappy, so the Apostles gathered everyone together. They said, "We don't want anyone to miss out on the food. But it takes a lot of time to buy and pass the food to everyone. If we spend all of our time passing out food, we won't have enough time to pray and teach about Jesus. It would not be right to stop teaching about Jesus and praying."

"We have an idea. We Apostles will stop distributing food so that we can spend our time praying, preaching and teaching. We want everyone to choose seven other men to be in charge of passing out the food. Make sure these men are faithful to God and full of the Spirit. Choose wise men because it will be their job to make sure everything is fair and that none of the widows miss out."

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Everyone thought this was a really good idea, so they chose seven men: Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas. The Apostles prayed for these men, and they began their work.

From then on, the widows and everyone else received their fair share of food, and the Apostles taught even more people about Jesus. Now that everyone was sharing in the work, the church grew bigger and bigger every day.

What jobs do people do in your church? Are there elders and preachers? Are there deacons or men and women who serve the church in special ways? In what ways do you help the church?

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- What was the problem concerning the widows in Acts chapter 6? (Some were not getting their food when it was passed out)
- What did the Apostles do to ensure the widows were cared for in the early church? (They asked the brothers and sisters in Christ to choose seven faithful men to lead the feeding of the widows)
- Why didn't the Apostles take the lead in feeding the widows? (They did not want to take time away from teaching God's word and praying)
- What did the Apostles tell the people to look for when choosing deacons? (men full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom)
- What did the Apostles do when the deacons were chosen? (They prayed and laid their hands on the deacons)
- What is a deacon? (A person chosen to serve the church)
- What is an elder? (A mature man who is chosen to lead and care for the people in the church, just like a shepherd cares for his sheep)
- What does this story show you about God?
- What does this story show you about people?

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- What is more important in this story, serving people's physical needs or praying and sharing about Jesus? (They are both important)

Reflection:

- What kind of food do you think the widows were given?
- How do you think the widows felt when they were given food by the church? What about the widows who were left out and not given food?
- If you were a widow, how would you feel knowing that leaders were in charge of ensuring you received food?
- Do you think it is important to have leaders? Why or why not?
- What are some of the ways your church leads or serves?
- Who does your church care about and serve?
- The early church valued serving, praying, teaching God's word, and many other things. Are there other important things Christians do together?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- Roll the Gospel Chariot Song
- ABC: Jesus Died for You and Me Song
- J-E-S-U-S Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Invite the deacons or other helpers from our congregation to visit and talk about their work areas.
- Write "thank-you" notes to the deacons in your congregation. Or send notes to anyone who helps the church in some way.
- Prepare small gift baskets for some widows in the congregation or community. You might want to prepare the baskets and have the children bring food next week.

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- Help children go through the church directory to find the names of widows in your congregation.
- Arrange a visit to a widow in the congregation.
- It can be helpful to demonstrate the need to delegate and have organisation by getting the children to list various jobs that need doing, so that the church keeps working and serving God. Then you can ask them, “Do you think one person could do all that all of the time?” Use this to show how God needs His people to share the load, and organisation helps us to do that. Role-playing chaotic situations that require organisation could be another way to communicate to the children how we need organisation daily—*idea submitted by Kayla Robinson.*

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:



Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Craft ideas for gift baskets (Artists helping children) (scroll down the page once you link to it)
- Custom, printable greeting cards (DLTK)

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