



# DEACONS

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

# **A Biblical Perspective on Deacons in the Church**

## **Understanding the Office**

Deacons play an important role in a growing, biblical church. As Satan attempts to disrupt the unity and peace within a church and to spoil its public reputation, God gives deacons the opportunity to prevent that from happening (Acts 6:1). Maintaining unity in a church is essential to accomplishing God's purpose for the church. In fact, on the night prior to his crucifixion, Christ prayed fervently for unity among believers (John 17:20-23). In a special way, God continues to answer this prayer through the ministry of faithful deacons in churches worldwide. To accomplish this, it is necessary for deacons to understand and practice what the Bible teaches about this office. Doing so will strengthen a church and prepare it for new growth and expansion. Questions for Review

1. How do deacons protect the church from Satan?
2. How are deacons an answer to Christ's prayer?

### ***A Biblical and Historical Role***

Deacons are not a modern church innovation. They have served alongside pastors from the outset of church history, appearing first in the Jerusalem congregation not long after Pentecost (Acts 6:1-7). Some years later, Paul specifically mentioned both pastors and deacons as designated roles in another church, this time at Philippi (Phil 1:1). In a letter to Timothy, he mentioned deacons again in partnership with pastors. On this occasion, he provided a collection of qualifications for men who would serve in this role (1 Tim 3:8-13). Beyond these references, some suggest that like Paul, Peter also alluded to pastors as "those who speak" and deacons as "those who minister" in 1 Peter 4:11. But regardless of whether Peter was referring to pastors and deacons, the clear trail of evidence demonstrates that the role of deacons in a church is both biblical and historical. Questions for Review

3. When are deacons first mentioned in the Bible?
4. Where are deacons and pastors mentioned together as two different roles in the church?

### ***A Servant Role***

The *deacon* title derives from a general Greek word that describes the work of a servant (*diakonos*). In standard usage, it described someone devoted to carrying out the commands, accomplishing the will, or meeting the needs of another person. As an apostle, Paul described himself as a "*servant of the Lord*" (Rom 1:1; Col 1:25). He also described Apollos, Timothy and other believers the same way (1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:4; 1

Thess 3:2). Furthermore, Matthew used this word broadly to describe servants who carried out the orders of a king (Matt 22:13), and John used it to describe waiters who served food and drink to people at a banquet (John 2:5, 9). Ultimately, Jesus urged all his followers to adopt this servant mindset throughout life, serving others and taking the lowest position (Matt 20:26, 28; Mark 9:35; Luke 22:26-27). Altogether, this full range of meaning describes the essence of a deacon's role in a church. While all Christians should behave like a servant, deacons must devote themselves voluntarily and sacrificially to meet the specific needs of others in a church in a special and official way. Questions for Review

5. What does the Greek word for *deacon* mean?
6. What kind of things does this person do?
7. How should deacons be an example for every believer to follow?
8. How are deacons different from the other believers in a church?

### ***A Strategic Role***

Pastors are responsible to administrate the affairs and care for all the needs of a congregation. The leaders of the church at Jerusalem did this by distributing financial and material resources to members in need (Acts 4:32-35). But when these pressing nonspiritual needs prevent pastors from giving proper attention to spiritual needs, deacons become necessary (Acts 6:2). *Spiritual needs* are those needs which are closely associated with prayer and Bible teaching (Acts 6:4).

*Nonspiritual needs* then are those needs which are physical, material, financial or operational nature. For instance, the word *business, duty, or task (chreia)* in Acts 6:3 refers either to an urgent need which is going unmet. Caring for widows in the church arose as the first such need (Acts 6:1). Similar needs today include visiting shut-ins and hospitals patients, or handling and disbursing finances designated for church purposes. By extension, we can conclude that deacons should meet whatever needs – whether physical, material, financial, or operational – are causing unrest in a congregation or inhibiting the pastors from meeting spiritual needs adequately. Questions for Review

9. When does a church need deacons?
10. What are the two primary responsibilities that pastors must do?
11. How do deacons help pastors to fulfill their responsibilities?
12. What are some examples of the kind of needs that deacons should meet?

### ***A Special Role***

Churches easily misunderstand the role of deacons, elevating them to a place of prestige, power and political clout. But Scripture paints the opposite picture. Contrary to prevailing opinion, deacons do not form a governing body. Instead, they form a team that carries out delegated instructions and performs necessary routine tasks. As such, they minister quietly and without applause. When men fulfill these duties in a faithful, God-pleasing manner, God provides a remarkable commendation.

*Those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim 3:13)*

To “serve well” means to fulfill your responsibility in a way that is accurate, right and good. The result of doing this will be a “good standing” and “great boldness in the faith.” Now the first result (“good standing”) does not refer to a formal promotion in rank within the church, like “climbing the corporate ladder” in the business world. Instead, it most likely refers to gaining an excellent reputation among people over time, both in the church and in the community at large, as they see your faithful service and a job well done.

The second result, “great boldness in the faith,” most likely refers to increased confidence in sharing the gospel with others. Scripture often uses boldness to describe confidence in proclaiming your faith (Acts 4:13, 29, 31; 9:27, 29; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8). Furthermore, two of the original deacons clearly showed what this is like. Stephen, a deacon (Acts 6:5), suffered martyrdom for his courageous witness (Acts 7:1-60). He also influenced the eventual conversion of Paul the apostle (Acts 7:58, cf. 9:5). Then Philip, another deacon (Acts 6:5), shared his faith in Samaria and many converted to the faith (Acts 8:5-25). He also witnessed effectively to a foreign government official and evangelized in many other cities (Acts 8:26-40). His gospel witness was so effective that the church came to recognize him not only as a deacon, but as an evangelist (Acts 21:8). The example of these two deacons help us to understand what Paul taught about other faithful deacons who serve their churches today (1 Tim 3:13). Questions for Review

13. How do churches misunderstand the role of deacons in a church?

14. What does it mean to “serve well” as a deacon?

15. What does it mean to receive “a good standing” as a deacon?

16. What does it mean to receive “great boldness in the faith” as a deacon?

17. How do Stephen and Philip show us what this means?

## Understanding the Qualifications

Not all men in a church can be deacons. In two places, Scripture gives guidelines for selecting new deacons. The first passage names general personal qualities to look for in new deacons (Acts 6:3, 5). The second names a series of more specific qualifications (1 Tim 3:8-12). Together, these passages equip congregations to identify potential deacons. They also equip pastors and active deacons to train future deacons. Churches should not appoint men who lack the character and reputation these passages portray. It is better to have no deacons at all than to have unqualified deacons. Questions for Review

18. What does Acts 6 teach about looking for new deacons?

19. What does 1 Timothy 3 teach us about looking for new deacons?

### ***Essential Personal Qualities (Acts 6:3, 5)***

#### *A Good Reputation*

Potential deacons must have a good reputation both in the congregation and in the community at large. Imagine that your church is considering a man in the church to be a new deacon. Before you ask him, you conduct spontaneous interviews, inside and outside the church, asking people for their candid opinion of this man. If he has a “good reputation,” then you would receive a lot of positive feedback about him. If not, then you would receive bad or mixed reviews.

A good reputation is necessary because deacons handle the financial and material matters of the church. They receive funds, manage funds and distribute them. They must be counted on to handle these affairs with confidentiality, impartiality and integrity. In the Jerusalem church, for instance, the Hellenist believers (Greek-speaking Jews) worried about favoritism towards the Hebrew-speaking widows. Therefore, it was necessary for the church to view the deacons that were chosen to be impartial and trustworthy.

#### Questions for Review:

20. What does it mean to have a good reputation?

21. Why is it important for a deacon to have a good reputation?

#### *Full of the Holy Spirit*

Luke mentions twice that a deacon must be full of the Holy Spirit, emphasizing the spiritual nature of this ministry and preventing a secular approach. The word *full* describes this man as being permeated by the influence of the Holy Spirit, fully yielded to God’s control. While it may seem difficult to tell whether a man is yielded to the invisible Spirit, Scripture provides five indicators which may be observed.

First, he shares his faith with courage (Acts 2:2, 4; 3:10; 4:8, 31; 5:3, 17, 28; 9:17; 13:9, 45, 52; 14:17; 19:29). Second, he memorizes and meditates on the Word of God (Col 3:16). Paul equates this characteristic with being filled with the Spirit in a parallel passage (Eph 5:18). This is significant, because a congregation must have confidence that a potential deacon will make decisions guided by the Word of God. Consequently, a man who is filled with the Spirit and the Word will manifest three additional characteristics. He praises God from his heart and sings during congregational singing (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). Furthermore, he exhibits a thankful spirit (Eph 5:20; Col 3:17) and a humble approach to human relationships which elevates the needs of others over his own (Eph 5:21).

#### Questions for Review:

22. What does it mean for a person to be “full of the Holy Spirit”?

23. What are five indicators that a man is filled with the Spirit?

#### *Full of Wisdom*

Luke teaches that a prospective deacon must be full of wisdom, emphasizing an ability to make skillful choices. Deacons make many important choices, big and small, which require thoughtfulness, maturity and a commitment to biblical principle. This is especially important when their decisions and tasks affect human feelings, finances and other sensitive factors. This wisdom must be more than common business expertise and common sense (Jam 3:14-16). It must be biblical in content and spiritual in nature (Jam 3:13, 17-18). Such wisdom can only be learned through a personal study of the Word of God and through humble, prayerful trust in God (2 Chron 1:10; Prov 2:1-5; Jam 1:5).

#### Questions for Review:

24. What does it mean for a person to be “full of wisdom”?

25. Why is this important for a deacon?

26. How does a man get this wisdom?

#### *Full of Faith*

Luke teaches that a prospective deacon must be full of faith. To describe a man as “permeated with faith” implies firm confidence in the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, unrelenting reliance on God and faithful obedience to Scripture. In the most evident sense, such a man would be willing to share his faith and identify with Christ, even when confronted with martyrdom like Stephen (Acts 7:54-60).

Questions for Review:

27. In your own words, describe what it means for a man to be “full of faith”?

28. How does the example of Stephen show us what this means?

***Essential Testimony Qualifications (1 Tim 3:8-12)***

As churches multiplied, the need for a more specific list of deacon qualifications developed. So, in a letter to Timothy that provided instructions for proper church protocol, Paul provided such a list. This list continues to serve as a standard set of essential testimony qualifications for deacons today, enabling congregations to recognize qualified men in an objective manner. These qualifications do not replace the initial qualities given to the church at Jerusalem, but they elucidate and expand them instead.

Questions for Review:

29. Why might a more detailed set of deacon qualifications become necessary?

30. What is the relationship between the qualities in Acts 6 and in 1 Timothy 3?

*A Man*

Men certainly qualify to hold this office (Acts 6:3; 1 Tim 3:8-9). However, some propose that women may also do so and not without warrant. For instance, Paul names a lady, Phoebe, as a “a servant of the church at Cenchrea” and uses the word that sometimes means “a deacon” (Rom 16:1). Furthermore, the word that our English translations render as the “wives” of deacons may easily be translated as “women in general” (1 Tim 3:11). On this basis, some churches appoint both men and women as deacons.

Nevertheless, it seems more probable that the office of deacon may be occupied only by men. They must be the “husbands of one wife” and they must “rule their children and household affairs well” (1 Tim 3:12). Moreover, if Paul intended to distinguish female deacons in 1 Timothy 3, he could have used the word for a deacon, *diakonos*, accompanied by a feminine article (*tas*), which would translate as “female deacons.” But Paul used the generic word for *women* and *wives* instead (*gynaikos*). So like pastors, deacons must also be men.

Questions for Review:

31. Why do some people believe that men *and* women may be deacons?

32. How does 1 Timothy 3:12 indicate that only men may be deacons?

### *Reverent*

This qualification suggests that a prospective deacon must be a serious-minded man who approaches life and ministry in a dignified, purposeful way. He should be neither frivolous nor aloof, but earnest and winsome in his interaction with others. His lifestyle should be worthy of respect and emulation. His worship should be wholehearted and sincere.

#### Questions for Review:

33. What does it mean to be reverent?

34. Describe how a reverent man conducts his life?

### *Not Double-tongued*

Deacons interact with people throughout a church and community, in homes and elsewhere. In doing so, they intercept many opinions and perspectives from people. Therefore, it is important that they do not say one thing to one person and another thing to someone else. They must be counted on to relay accurate information between parties and to sincerely express their own perspective. A “single-tongued” deacon strengthens the unity of a church, while a double-tongued deacon spreads discord and division.

#### Questions for Review:

35. What does a “double-tongued” person do?

36. What does a “single-tongued” person do?

### *Not Given to Much Wine*

Deacons must be men who give no attention to intoxicating beverages. This principle applies to other mind-altering substances as well. Deacons must be disciplined men who think in a clear and rational way. In fact, Paul says that being under the influence of intoxicating drink is the direct opposite of being filled with the Spirit, which you already know is a necessary quality for deacons (Eph 5:18). This commitment to abstinence guards a man’s public reputation and his ability to make sound decisions on behalf of the church (Eph 5:17).

#### Questions for Review:

37. How would the influence of mind-altering substances prevent a deacon from serving well?

38. How does a man who practices abstinence uphold the reputation of the church?



### *Not Greedy for Money*

Deacons handle the financial affairs of a church firsthand by receiving, allocating and disbursing the funds. Because of this, they may be tempted to use their office for personal advantage. This requires the absence of any personal conflicts of interest regarding financial gain. No prospective deacon should manifest a tendency, desire or need to improve his own financial standing or meet his own financial needs through his position as a deacon. Evidences of such a conflict include: 1) excessive debt, 2) wasteful spending, 3) extravagant living, 4) workaholism, 5) financial dependency, 6) unemployment due to laziness, 7) gambling and playing the lottery, 7) tax evasion, and 8) questionable business practices. Prospective deacons should be faithful, content and impartial stewards in the financial realm.

#### Questions for Review:

39. Why is it important that a deacon not be greedy for money?

40. What are some evidences that a man may be tempted to use his role as a deacon for his own personal benefit?

### *Committed to a Pure Conscience*

Paul teaches that deacons should “hold the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience” (1 Tim 3:9). *Mystery* means a secret that has been revealed. The *faith* refers to the content of the Christian faith, especially the truth about Jesus Christ revealed in the gospel (1 Tim 3:16). So, a prospective deacon must be a man who applies the truth of the gospel consistently and conscientiously to all aspects of his life, morally and otherwise. To do this, he allows the gospel to train every aspect of his conscience so that the choices he makes in daily life match the kind of genuine, godliness revealed in Christ (1 Tim 1:5, 19; 4:2; 2 Tim 1:3; Titus 1:15). Deacons must be men who cherish the gospel and reject worldliness, believing that the gospel is both a holy message and a holy calling. They do not separate their lives into separate compartments, secular and sacred. They believe that all of life is sacred and must be governed by the gospel. Their life matches this belief.

#### Questions for Review:

41. What does it mean to practice “the mystery of the faith”?

42. Can you describe in your own words what this kind of life is like?

### *Proven*

A church should not appoint a new convert to the office of a deacon, nor should they appoint a man with whom they are not familiar. We learn the importance of this by noticing

the word *first*. Paul said that prospective deacons must “first be tested.” Before a church chooses a new deacon, they must test him first, verifying his character. To rush forward and disregard this stipulation will lead to unfortunate results. Such a man will eventually either hurt the church or become hurt himself because he was not qualified. To avoid this, churches should train and mentor men to become qualified deacons over time. When the need for new deacons arises, they should select from among those men who have proven themselves to be reliable in an unofficial capacity.

Questions for Review:

43. What does it mean to test a deacon first?

44. What can a church do to prepare future deacons who are qualified?

*Good Family Relationships*

This qualification encompasses the domestic reputation of a prospective deacon, as a husband and a father. Though this does not require a deacon to be married or to have children, this domestic experience certainly gives a man an advantage of increased perspective, experience, and maturity. That being said, it is also true that unmarried men are more available to do the work of the Lord in an undistracted way (1 Cor 7:32).

Regarding marriage, a prospective deacon must be “a one-woman man.” This requirement prohibits polygamy, adultery, pornography addiction, and requires that a man have a testimony of faithfulness to his wife if married.

The nature of a deacon’s ministry requires that his wife also exhibit certain qualities of a godly woman and helpmate. Like her husband, she must be reverent and serious-minded about life and ministry. She should be free from any tendency towards gossip, insulting language, false accusations, and hurtful speech. Furthermore, she should conduct her life in a balanced way that demonstrates clear thinking, emotional stability, self-control, and freedom from intoxicants like alcohol. She should be trustworthy and reliable.

In addition to his marriage, a prospective deacon who has children living under his care at home should demonstrate competency as a father. He should guide his family in such a way that his children respect his leadership and follow his instructions. This qualification is especially important because the home provides the truest test of a man’s character.

Questions for Review:

45. Why does a man’s home life qualify or disqualify him from being a deacon?

46. What kind of relationship and reputation must a deacon have towards his wife?

47. Describe the reputation that is required for the wife of a deacon.

48. Describe the kind of relationship a deacon should have with the children who are living under his care.

### ***Essential Clarifications***

#### *Not Necessarily Able to Teach*

Having considered the qualifications for prospective deacons, churches should also recognize one noteworthy quality that Scripture does not require. They must not be required to show an aptitude for teaching ministry. Scripture strongly requires that pastors be able to teach, but there is no such requirement for deacons (1 Tim 3:2). Though a deacon may certainly be able to teach, this is not required. If churches fail to recognize this, they will overlook God-given, qualified men.

#### Questions for Review:

49. What is one requirement for pastors that is *not* a requirement for deacons?

50. Why is it important for a church to recognize this?

#### *Not Perfect*

Altogether, the deacon qualities and qualifications may be combined and summarized as being “blameless” (1 Tim 3:10). This does not mean perfection, or no men could ever serve as deacons. What this means instead is that no one should be able to accuse a prospective deacon of noteworthy misconduct or inconsistency. From a theological standpoint, we know that every Christian is blameless before God. Paul tells us that Christ will present every genuine believer blameless before God (Col 1:22-23). This is encouraging news!

But the matter of a deacon’s blameless reputation concerns something else. It concerns the accusations of people around us and not our gracious, forgiving God. It especially concerns the accusations of unsaved people (1 Tim 3:7). Whereas brothers and sisters in Christ will generally be forgiving towards one another, the unsaved often look for opportunities to point fingers at the church and the gospel she represents. For this reason, prospective deacons should not carry with them any valid charge of known wrongdoing.

#### Questions for Review:

51. What does being blameless *not* mean?

52. What does it mean to be blameless?

### *Not Equal by Comparison*

As a church learns to identify potential deacons, they also should not expect every candidate to exhibit necessary qualities to the same degree. While all candidates should exhibit the qualities prescribed by Scripture, some will do so more distinctly. Luke hints at this by the way he lists the men chosen by the church at Jerusalem. He names Stephen first, then mentions some of his personal qualities immediately afterward. By doing this, he does not imply that Stephen was the only deacon who possessed these qualities. Instead, he indicates that while these qualities described all seven men, they described Stephen in a very distinct way. In fact, Luke reiterates this man's outstanding testimony in subsequent statements (Acts 6:8, 10; 7:55). Knowing this, congregations should refrain from comparing deacons against one another, whether active or prospective, just as they should refrain from doing so with pastors or with each other (1 Cor 10:12). Though some candidates will exhibit certain qualities more distinctly than others, none will do so perfectly or to the same degree.

### Questions for Review:

53. How does Luke indicate that the qualifications of some deacons may be more obvious than others?

54. Why is it important not to compare one deacon with another?

## **Understanding the Responsibilities**

### ***A Ministry of Benevolent Care***

The need for deacons initially arose to ensure that widows received proper care in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 6:1). This benevolent activity for those in need is at the heart of Christian duty and devotion (Jam 1:27). For a church to do this in a biblical way requires proper attention and oversight, which deacons can facilitate.

First, they should determine which widows require church assistance. A widow having close family members, especially believing ones, does not require church benevolence; deacons should encourage their close family to care for her instead (1 Tim 5:4, 8, 16). Second, she should be past the age of marriage and unable to provide income for herself (1 Tim 5:9, 11-12, 14). Third, she should demonstrate exemplary Christian character (1 Tim 5:3). An exemplary widow should manage her finances in a frugal, sacrificial, faithbased manner, being a good steward of the resources God provides for her (Luke 21:23). In contrast, she should not spend her resources frivolously on pleasure (1 Tim 5:6). Furthermore, she should engage in regular prayer as a habit of life, using discretionary time to intercede for her needs and the needs of the church (Luke 2:36-38; 1 Tim 5:5). She should not engage in gossip, but she should involve herself in whatever church ministry venues and good works she able to perform (1 Tim 5:1-10).

Widows who meet these qualifications should be accounted for by the church (1 Tim 5:9). The biblical phrase “taken into the number” means “to enroll, or to put on a list.” Who should manage this list and care for the widows on it? Ideally, the deacons will perform this function. This benevolent care ministry requires financial allocation and disbursement in responsible ways. It also requires visits to the homes and hospitals to maintain contact with these widows. These visits should include prayer, Bible study, patient listening, assessing needs, and providing help beyond money, such as necessary transportation, house projects, and other helpful errands.

Beyond this ministry to the godly widows in a church, deacons should also be assigned oversight of other needs for benevolent care that may diminish the ability of the pastors to focus on prayer and Bible teaching. This breadth of responsibility overlaps with another aspect of deacon ministry.

#### Questions for Review:

55. What was the first circumstance that caused a need for deacons?

56. Describe the kind of widow(s) that should and should not receive care from the church (based upon 1 Timothy 5)?

57. What does it mean for widows to be “taken into the number” by the deacons?

58. What are some other needs similar to widow care that deacons may help to meet?

#### ***A Ministry of Financial Stewardship***

As widow-care ministry demonstrates, deacons play a vital role in managing church finances. As God’s people follow biblical principles of financial stewardship and give money to support the ministry of the church, deacons should take responsibility to ensure that these funds are managed and distributed properly.

Biblical examples of assessing financial needs and meeting them with church funds extends to a variety of objectives. Churches should provide well-serving pastors with necessary financial support (Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17-18). Paul teaches this by alluding to the way that a farmer provides food and housing for the animals that plow his fields and the way that Temple proceeds provided for the material and financial needs of the priests (1 Cor. 9:7-14).

Churches should receive, set aside, and distribute offerings to meet one-time, occasional needs of other members, faithful church servants, missionaries, and churches in need (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 11:29-30; Rom 15:25; 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 9:1-15; 11:7-9; Phil 4:16-19).

Furthermore, churches should ensure proper compliance to taxation and employment laws which do not violate God's commands (Rom 13:1-7; cf. Acts 5:29). By logical extension, the stewardship of church resources extends beyond finances to other categories of stewardship as well, such as building and property maintenance, mail and correspondence, and legal engagement.

Questions for Review:

59. How do we know that deacons play a vital role in managing church finances?
60. On what basis do churches provide for the financial and material needs of pastors?
61. Describe at least three examples from Scripture of a church meeting one-time, occasional needs of other believers.
62. Why is it important for churches to comply with taxation and employment laws?
63. What are some other kinds of stewardship and material resource needs and functions which deacons should help to meet?

***A Ministry of Voluntary Activity***

In contrast to the pastoral office, there is no biblical evidence to suggest that deacons received remuneration for the services they rendered to the church. However, it is important to provide them with the necessary freedom and resources to complete the tasks which the church has assigned to them, without encumbrance. Pastors should provide general leadership and take ultimate responsibility for the services that deacons provide. But after they define such duties, they should refrain from micromanaging these affairs.

Failure to interact with deacons in this way will undermine their fundamental function, which is freeing up the pastors from over-involvement in the financial and material affairs of the church. While it is true that deacons (and the congregation) should show general respect to the preaching and teaching ministry of pastors (Heb 13:17), it is also true that pastors (and the congregation) should show general respect to the serving ministry of the deacons. The key is that both fulfill their duties in submission to the clear teaching of the Word of God (Acts 17:11; 1 Cor 11:1; 2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17; 4:2).

Questions for Review:

64. Why is it important for pastors and deacons (and a church) to show respect to one another in fulfilling their respective roles?
65. What is the key for pastors and deacons fulfilling their duties properly?

## Understanding the Process

Apart from the character qualifications we've already considered, the only place in Scripture that provides insight into appointing new deacons is Acts 6:1-6. Since no later teaching in Acts or the epistles alters or annuls this example and since this example follows a longstanding historical precedent in Scripture (Exo 18:21; Deut 1:13), it is fitting to view this scenario as a biblical case study for appointing deacons in a church. In this example, we find harmonious cooperation between pastors and the congregation.

### Questions for Review:

66. What New Testament passage provides evidence for how to appoint new deacons?

67. What Old Testament, historical example does this resemble?

### ***Pastors recognized a need within the congregation.***

As the pastors of the growing church at Jerusalem disciplined new converts and mingled with people throughout the church, they heard a growing criticism (Acts 6:1). Greek-speaking Jewish converts complained that widows in Hebrew-speaking families were receiving preferential treatment, while other widows were being neglected. The pastors agreed that this unintended problem needed to be resolved, providing all widows with proper care and guarding the church from division. However, they knew that solving this logistical problem themselves would diminish their ability to meet the necessary spiritual needs of the congregation (Acts 6:2, 4).

### Questions for Review:

68. Who recognized the need for deacons?

69. How did they learn about this need?

### ***Pastors defined the need, outlined the qualifications, then asked for recommendations from the congregation***

The pastors of the church at Jerusalem did not merely select and appoint men to meet this need. Instead, they asked the congregation to recommend an appropriate number of men from within the congregation for this purpose (Acts 6:3). Doing this ensured that the church would appoint men whom the congregation trusted and respected, encouraging transparency and enabling proper representation.

Furthermore, the pastors required a plurality of deacons. In fact, as with pastors, the NT always refers to deacons as a plurality (Phil 1:1). Multiple deacons ensure proper accountability and necessary camaraderie to fulfill their tasks. For selecting these men,

the pastors provided basic guidelines for the spiritual and personal character required to serve in this capacity (Acts 6:3, 5). Several years later, Paul provided more detailed requirements (1 Tim 3:8-13).

Questions for Review:

70. Whom did the pastors ask to recommend new deacons?

71. Why is it beneficial for a church to have more than one deacon?

***Pastors confirmed the candidates.***

Once the congregation had selected seven candidates with unanimous consent, they presented the names to the pastors of the church. After affirming that these men met the necessary requirements, the pastors prayerfully and officially appointed these men to meet the needs of the widows in the church. It is instructive to note that this appointing process, whereby the people receiving representation nominate representatives, but leadership appoints them appears in the significant OT counterpart to NT deacon delegation. In this scenario, Moses instructed the congregation of Israel to select men to represent them, having specific qualifications (Exo 18:21). He said, "You choose them and I will appoint them, so long as they meet the qualifications" (Deut 1:13). The church at Jerusalem followed the same pattern in selecting and appointing deacons.

Questions for Review:

72. Who confirmed the qualifications of the new deacon recommendations?

73. How did Moses show a similar example?

## **Conclusion**

In summary, God intends for churches to appoint deacons who will relieve the pastors of a growing congregation from many of these duties. This enables pastors to devote more continual effort to prayer, meditation, counseling, teaching, mentoring, sermon preparation, and other forms of Bible study that will meet the spiritual needs of the church (Acts 6:4; 1 Tim 4:13-16). Following this God-ordained strategy of delegation yields optimal results. In this arrangement, not only do pastors strengthen their focus and become more effective at meeting the spiritual needs of the congregation, but members also receive more efficient care of other important needs at the same time.

This comprehensive increase of efficiency boosts morale, accelerates personal growth, and improves ministry preparedness throughout the congregation (Eph 4:11-16). Beyond this internal upside, there is an external and eternal upside as well. This pastor-deacon



arrangement improves the reputation of the church in the surrounding community and expands gospel outreach possibilities and effectiveness.

*Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:7)*