

The First Deacons

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Date: 17 August 2025

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[0:01] Morning, everyone. Good to see us all. We're continuing and going back to the book of Acts. Just to recap, if you've been in and out over the summer, we've been doing this series on apologetics, which is just to answer some of the hard questions that we have, whether it's about science or suffering or the purpose and meaning of life, all these kind of things. And so we're going to put a pause there.

Let me just tell you, just to reiterate again, the purpose of that series was not so that you could be better at arguing with other people about the faith. That is not what it is, because you can be the best at arguing and actually win them over intellectually or to the point where you just beat them into submission with your words and you're like, okay, I've won. You still can't win their hearts. You still can't win their souls. In fact, it's not you who does win any of their hearts and souls. It's God. The whole point, I think, at least my heart for that series was just to encourage you that when you're faced with some of these doubts about purpose and meaning, when you're faced with some of these questions in your head about, well, what about science or what about suffering, that you would be like, oh, actually, there was an answer to that. I don't remember it because I wasn't fully paying attention, but there was an answer to that that I can now go back to Spotify and find the answers to or go to Google or AI. Our faith is question-proof. We may not know all the answers, but God is bigger than our questions. Just because we can't answer them doesn't mean that God doesn't exist, was really the point of that series. We're going to go back to the book of Acts now because whilst we have all those questions, actually, and we're equipped and we have all the intellectual knowledge we need, if we just sit on the couch and we don't go out and we don't actually go and scatter, it all is still meaningless. So we're going to go back in the book of Acts where we see these people basically catch fire and then start spreading to the point where now that we're here in Hong Kong hearing about the same message that those people took from those days. And so just to give you a recap of the book of Acts, it's just, we only got up to chapter five. Okay, so the first chapter is the first flying man.

You see Jesus ascending and saying, I'll be back. And then he says, but I will pour out my spirit onto you and you need to take that. You can't just stay in one place. You have to go. You have to go to the ends of the earth.

But for now, go to Jerusalem. For now, go to that Jerusalem, to the place that you know, and wait for me there. Can you imagine just a man flying into the sky and says, I'll be back. Go to Jerusalem. Wait for me there.

[2:24] You would be just as shocked as they were. And so they got back to Jerusalem, didn't know what to do. Couldn't go back home because of what they just saw. So they're like, well, let's just go pray. So they found an upper room and they went to pray and they prayed for 10 days straight, 10 day prayer meeting.

And then the Holy Spirit descends on them. And that is Acts chapter two. Pentecost comes. They start speaking in tongues. Peter, the impulsive coward, violent Peter, stands up filled with the spirit and gives the sermon of his life.

The kerygma, the gospel, talking about Jesus. Jesus's life, Jesus's death, and Jesus's resurrection. And what happens? The people are filled with the spirit. They are cut to the heart. Acts chapter two, verse 37.

They are cut to the heart and they go, well, what must we do? What must we do to be saved? And so he says, well, be baptized, repent, and you'll receive the forgiveness of sins.

And from that moment on, you will be a new community. And then Acts two, 42 to 47 is the new community where there's a field of reverence and awe. They're devoting themselves to just fellowship, breaking bread, communion, prayer. And then they see just, they just, they have glad

and generous hearts.

[3:33] The Lord adds to the number. The church grows from 120 to 3,000. Just think of a logistical nightmare that would be. But here it is. It grows. Chapter three, they go out and they see people who are in need. The lame beggar is healed. They heal him, but they get in trouble for healing him. So Acts chapter four, they're dragged into court. They're dragged in front of the Sanhedrin. Why did you heal this guy?

Who are you? I said, who are we listening to? We're not scared of you. We just followed a guy who told us he would die and come back again. And he did exactly just that. We're going to follow him. Now we're going to respect you and you can do whatever you want to us, but you can't touch us really because of that guy. And then the community continues to grow. And then it grows and they get more and more generous. There's no one in need, remember? And then of course, there's the first death.

A couple who had spiritual pride, who wanted to be seen as people who were holy, who were good. And so they saw other people giving generously. So they decided, hey, I want to give generously, but I want to appear to be more generous than I actually was. So here I am. Because actually, in some ways, I don't blame them. They didn't have to do any of that stuff. So they did it. They just held a little bit back. And my question I remember was, hey, it's not about what you're giving already.

It's actually about what you're still holding back. That's the key. God doesn't care about how much you're actually giving. He's looking at your heart and going, well, is there something that you're still holding back from me? And sadly, they meet a very drastic end because at that point, the integrity of the church, the purity of the church was so important. Can you imagine starting a church at that moment on a lie? We wouldn't be here, if we're honest. So they take the hit.

[5:16] And that's when we move to Acts chapter 6. We don't know the time difference between Acts chapter 5 and 6, but it's probably a while. And what we see then is actually the church growing even more.

And that's when some of the problems are coming. So we're going to go through that. We're only going to be doing seven verses. It's not just going to be me talking. I'm going to invite a friend up to talk as well. But I truly believe in these seven verses, we'll find out a little bit about church, a little bit about us, a little bit about God, and actually a little bit about our church, not just the gathering here. If you look at the full name of the gathering, it is the English Gathering of Kongfuk Church, which is part of EFCC, Evangelical Free Church of China.

That's why we're called just the gathering, because our full name is very long. But we're part of a wider church. So I want to take this chance actually to talk to you a little bit about that today as well. But before all of that, can we have the word of God to be ministering to us? I'm going to invite Andy to come up and speak and share from the word of God.

But I'm only joking, just reading. Can I invite you to stand for the word? It's okay, they're all friends. Now in these days, when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their windows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

[6:41] And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. And what they said pleased the whole gathering. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith, and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte of Antioch. And they sat before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. And a great many of the priests become obedient to the faith.

Thank you. This is the word of God. Can we give him a round of applause? Take a seat, please. Take a seat. Oh, that's so good. Some of those names. Some of those. Sounds like you're reading a different kind of Italian spaghettis and pastors. So I'm only going to do seven verses. I'm just going to go through verse by verse. You see chapter six, verse one here. Again, if you have your Bible, please just keep it open so you can see where I am in the sermon. That's helpful. And as I've told you many times before, I don't believe in the app. I only believe in the physical word of God. So, and if you want one, it's at the back over there. And if you don't have one at home, then if you take it, no one will notice. This is okay. Now, in these days, when the disciples were increasing in

number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. Isn't that just the purpose of the church, that the church would grow? We've all known churches, actually, we hear about churches that are dwindling and kind of dying and aging. But the whole purpose of the church is that it grows.

It's not always the case. And God does allow certain churches to die. I take great comfort and great trepidation in thinking that actually all the churches in the book of Revelation, they're not around anymore. They're just a pile of rocks. And Jesus says, if you're not doing what you're going to do, which is to the church of Ephesus, he says, you're not loving anymore. I'm going to cancel you out. I'm going to close you down. So Jesus isn't afraid to close churches down.

But this one is growing because the purpose of the church is to not just gather, but to scatter, to actually bring people in, to invite friends in, to actually share the gospel with them. If you're just here week in, week out, just doing your thing, then you've missed the point of church.

That's the whole point of what it's trying to say here. But then there's a problem. There's a complaint. There's the Hellenists. The Hellenists are basically the Greek speaking Jews. They probably came to Jerusalem during Pentecost to worship and filled with the Holy Spirit and became Christians. But so these were the Jewish diaspora almost who speak Greek. I don't know.

[9:34] I mean, they are equivalent, you know, Asian Americans or Australian born Chinese or British born Chinese. And they're all called back to the homeland. And so it's that kind of group of people. And so it's those people who were there. And of course, they are the minority.

And so you see that. And they arose against the Hebrews who were the ones who were Hebrew speaking Jews, those who were from Jerusalem, the OGs of the group of the people. And so there was a complaint against these, between these two groups of people because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. So there were a group of people, the needy, the widows who weren't getting the food that they needed. And then I stopped there. I go, wait a minute. It was only in chapter four where there was no one in need.

Where everything was good. We're all sharing. I'm going to buy, sell my house and I'm going to give you all my money. And John C is going to give me his Tesla. And it's going to be a great, wonderful time that we get to share all these different things together. And yet two chapters later, there's a group that don't get food. I'm careful not to kind of romanticize the churches in the Bible because they're still filled with people. And where there are people, there is selfishness. And so it doesn't take long. And so I'd encourage you, if you're sat here going, oh, this, my church isn't this church. Well, this church wasn't that great either because it was filled with people. And the church isn't really just about how great the people are. It's about how great God is. And so you see this group of widows, Greek speaking ones. And now the problem here is there was an economic disparity.

There were the rich and the poor, which is a normal thing. It was around when Jesus was around. The church of Philippi had a businesswoman and then had a slave girl.

Paul talks to the church in Corinth and saying, you guys are having communion, but you guys are having caviar and you guys are having Samsung or no food at all. There's a difference. This isn't how it's supposed to be. We're supposed to love one another together. And yet you see here, there is a problem. And of course, that is just simply just difference.

We're just surrounded by people who are different to us. The root of it, of course, is simply selfishness. Just on a side note there, the church is supposed to look after those who are in need.

[11:51] Even in the Old Testament, the prophets would say, would actually gauge a group of people's relationship to God by how much they are caring for the poor. Okay? That's how they would gauge.

And so the church has to have a role to play where we're actually serving those who are in need.

Now, here's the first critical point that comes out for me as I sit around looking at all of us here, English speaking Chinese in Anmuti in Hong Kong. Are there people in need here? Yes, there are. Are we helping them as much as we can? I wish we were. But that's where I also want to talk about the wider church. That there are things that are going on that we should hear about.

There are things that you and I could be doing. More things that we could be doing. The ministry of the Word fuels the ministry of tables. When we minister to people through the Word, it also has to bless their lives as well.

Francis Chan says this, If we only preach the gospel without caring for the poor, we fail. If we only care for the poor without preaching the gospel, we fail. Jesus did both. And so must we.

[13:03] But maybe just to kind of jump to their defense, this church, and give them the benefit of the doubt, there was another problem, just language. You know, these guys speak Greek. And these guys speak Hebrew.

And so somewhere along the line, it might not have been overt racism and discrimination. It was simply just, well, hey, I'm making an announcement. I'm shouting out loud. Hey, there's going to be food over here in Hebrew. And the ones who are speaking Greek just don't hear it.

They don't understand it. So they don't know what's happening. We're part of a wider church. And I sit in some meetings with my Cantonese and Mandarin counterparts. And sometimes in those meetings, they're in Chinese.

And I'll be honest, sometimes it just flies over my head. I don't know what they're saying. My Chinese is limited to ■■■ Chinese. Like, you know, ■■■, ■■■, ■■, those are fine.

But you start talking in Christianese, Chinese lingo, or just watching the news, it's over my head. So I can imagine maybe there's certain situations here where there is food being distributed and announced, and the Greek-speaking ones just don't hear, or they just don't understand it.

[14:04] So that might actually be a problem. Or there might just even be a cultural problem as well, because they're just different. I keep saying this. The irony of me here being a Chinese guy standing in Hong Kong, speaking to a group of people in English, we're just, we're in a really interesting space.

And there's language and cultural divides and generational divides. There are so many different divides. There are so many reasons why we shouldn't be part of the same church together. And yet here it is.

My problem is, I'm going to try and defend all of those things, but honestly, there are sometimes also no excuses, because we, even in this very niche community, we still like to hang out with people just like ourselves.

Correct? If we say that actually you're the, you're basically an average of the five people you spend the most time with. Have a think now, who the five people are. In this church, the people that, okay, we're not supposed to have favorites, but let's say if I just asked you, who are your favorite people in church?

Just three. Like, just don't even, don't even, you don't need to share it. The first few minds are popping up right now in your head. And then I asked you the second question, which is, how similar are they to you?

[15:20] The answer is, probably quite similar. If we're being very honest. Why? Because we naturally go towards the people who understand us.

We naturally go towards the people who empathize with us, who we can talk and have conversation with. So even in a group like this, where we are already niche, there are still people that we like to hang out with more.

So I don't think it's not as big a surprise that we're here right now. The problem here is this. Why aren't you hanging out with any people who are different to you? You really should.

I learned so much from hanging out with people who are different to me, who are much older than I, who I don't agree with, with everything. And yet, there's something that I can learn from them.

So if you're just averaging, if you look at the average five people that you hang out with, and they are all quite similar to you, my encouragement to you is find someone else. Find someone's different. Find someone who doesn't speak the same language as you do.

[16:17] And you learn something. I was really inspired by a conversation I had last Sunday with Ebenezer. Because I was like, he's like, the Western world and the, just in the Eastern world, the way they, the way they think, not even just communicate, the way they think, the values that they have, that sometimes those values they're not even aware of, is just so different.

I wish people would see that. We need to spend time with those who are not the same as us. I also think we are a special group. I think we're a special group because, no one, like with us Chinese, especially, those who are third culture kids, who can be a bit of both, we have a fantastic opportunity.

And I think the Hellenistic Jews would have had the same. So they were Jews, but they've gone to a foreign land. They can speak Greek. They can probably speak a little bit of Hebrew. That's the perfect group of people to be the bridge. That's the perfect group of people who can understand both sides.

I think we, I think there are people sat here in this room, who have the ability, and the capacity, and the calling to actually stand in the middle. Maybe not even just between two groups of people. Maybe even between three.

Because you can speak all three different languages. The Lord calls us to be people who stand in the gap. And so maybe as you evaluate who your five people are, maybe just see, okay, what kind of person are you?

[17 : 39] What ingredients are you made of? And maybe there's something that the Lord needs you to do to be in the gap there. I think there is a good opportunity. So that's the problem. Verse two, and the 12 summoned the full number of the disciples and said, it is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.

I love this. I always say, when in doubt, gather, just get together. Or when in conflict, communicate. Okay, just let's talk this through. Not passive aggressively. Let's talk this through clearly.

And so they get everyone involved. They get those who are in charge of distributing the food. They get all the disciples involved and say, hey, okay, there's a problem. These ladies aren't getting any food. We need to figure out how to do it.

But here's the problem. We're too busy standing up here, just preaching the word of God. We need help, is what they're saying. This is what they're not saying. That the person preaching is more important than the person serving tables.

That is not what they are saying. They are saying, this is what we're supposed to do. We need someone to help us do this. That is just as important. You are just as important as the person stood here preaching.

[18 : 45] You need to know that because often we confuse that and we think the church and everything should go through one person. That's not the case. He's saying, preaching of the word of God is the most important, but the person doing it isn't more important than the person serving tables.

Are you able to grasp that difference with me? It's very important. Because if you think I'm more important than you, you won't be doing what God's asking you to do. The mission statement, second one is, what are your gifts?

What are you called to do? You must be doing something. You're not here just to sit. But, preaching the word of God is very important because one of the other problems that we have in churches, often we run programs, we do lots of things, we get very busy and we miss the gospel altogether. And people can walk through our churches and go through our programs and our weeks and do all the fun things that we do, which are all great things, but they don't encounter the gospel. They're not grasped by the gospel. So, preaching the word is the most important.

And the other thing is, the church is obligated to care for people, to scatter, to spread the good news, and to also care for the needs of people. Because otherwise, they could have said, wait, we're hearing complaints that some ladies aren't getting food.

[19 : 59] Well, actually, the church, we're not supposed to just, we're not a restaurant, so they can go find their own food. That's not, they didn't say that. They said, there's people in need. We need to look after them.

So, my question for us is, do we go out of our way to spend time with people who we don't know, who aren't the same as us, and do we go out of our way to help those who are in need? And sometimes, that looks deeply uncomfortable.

That looks like hanging out with people who are in deep need, and you, you could have gone to watch a movie, but you didn't. You decided to stay and hang out with them until late in the evening. Just to be a friend.

Just to keep them company. That's what being the church is. Now, this goes into the topic of the church here. We've been here. Agnes, how long have we been in this place for?

Two years? We've been in this place for two years, and of course, we keep knocking out down different walls just to make a little bit more space and installing fans so you don't all faint during the summer.

[20 : 57] But I look at this, and I have to say, I have a little bit of comfort. Why? Because I know that our church is growing, and I know that we have lots of problems. I know there are people here who come in who don't even get spoken to at all.

You don't even get anyone smiling at you, and then you walk out. And that breaks my heart, because I'm like, that's not what it's supposed to be. But I also get there's just a lot of people here. I do get that.

And we're trying to find ways to, well, clearly, we're not above breaking walls, and we're not here to, we're looking, and I'm going to invite someone else and blame it all on him in a minute and have him explain to us why we're still here.

But it's a problem for me because I know there are people here who you've been coming and you want to be in a life group, and you're like, I just don't know how, seems a little bit cliquey, I don't even know how to get into it. And I'm like, that's not the heart.

I can assure you, that's not the heart. We are not just a church for young working professionals who are cool. Otherwise, Nathan wouldn't be here. We welcome all.

[22:06] But I don't know how to do it sometimes, because there's just too many people. You know, you walk in, and I see you, you're a new face. And I think I was telling Shigala the other day, I have this weird ability where when I'm on a Sunday, I actually know who's come to church and who hasn't.

Often because I have the opportunity to stare at you all for 40 minutes and see who's sleeping and who's not. But somehow, I just kind of seem to know because I see in your face. And sometimes I see you and I'm like, oh, I see you.

But by the time service finishes, you've gone because it's too overwhelming. So you have to go and there's no one you speak to. And I'm like, I wish I could speak to you. And I know that for some reason, the Chinese culture we have seemed to have more introverts than extroverts.

So all of this is just terrifying, which is why we came up with the WhatsApp QR code. It's like, okay, if it's too hard for you to say hello here, that's okay. Please WhatsApp us and we'll talk, we'll have an introverted conversation.

But eventually, we have to meet each other face to face because we're the gathering. You don't come to the gathering and you don't gather. That's, go find another church. But I feel how hard it is. I get it.

[23:09] I'm going to point out Caleb because it's just to embarrass him. Caleb came, he landed in Hong Kong a week and a half ago and last week he came to church for the very first time and didn't know anyone. Now, all of you have been there at some point.

You all came for the first time at some point. Apart from Hank. Hank built this whole place and he's been around for a hundred years. But, you feel that.

And Caleb, after the service, I know I'm embarrassing you here, I'm not really sorry. And he just came right up and he said, hey, it's my first time. I was like, oh, thank goodness for you that you would come and speak to me because if you had just drifted off, I wouldn't be able to get to know you.

I wouldn't find out that actually he's going to be teaching in my kids' school that actually he went to the same church as Gabe in Toronto and I'm like, oh, that is so cool. Please come back. Please have lunch.

And we got to know each other and you got to know different people. But I'll tell you, I do not underestimate how hard it is for someone to walk into a room like this and say hello to someone you don't know.

[24:09] Can we make that the norm? Can we try to? Can we try and say, hey, how are you? What's your name? You look different to me. You sound different to me. I'd like to get to know you because you can see it is so hard.

It is so hard to do that. Anyway, there's a problem. They can't be the ones that do it. So verse three, they say this, therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

Can you point, can you bring out seven people who are actually already serving, who have a good reputation, so they're not shady at all. They are known people. Can you have them come out so that they can help distribute the food, help to serve the food?

And that is the beginning of the word deacon. Now, our church, we have a board of deacons who are here to serve. They may not be the ones ministering and preaching the word of God week in, week out, but my goodness, they spend a lot of time serving in many different ways.

Now, this isn't the official start. It wasn't saying, Stephen, from this moment forth, you shall be called Deacon Stephen. It wasn't that. In fact, the term was just used to describe someone who is serving.

[25 : 27] I think the actual deacon name title came later. This was just Stephen and a group of other guys who were of good repute and were filled with the Holy Spirit who were chosen to come and actually help out.

And who did they pick? They picked seven guys who had Greek names. Why? Because that was the need. Greek-speaking widows didn't get food. Let's get the guys that are in so who can understand the announcements and who can speak to them and so they can know what their needs are and that they can then serve these widows.

Isn't that just good to hear? And it's interesting. What they didn't say was can we pick seven people who are quick thinkers, are fast on their feet and good with their hands and hold plates really well. It wasn't a competence test. It was a character test. In Young Life, when we look for people and hire for people, we often go with the four Cs. Do you remember what the four Cs are, Gabs?

No? First, no. That's why he's not working with Young Life anymore. Do you remember, JJ? Huh?

[26 : 34] No, the four Cs of a potential candidate. This is a great show for Young Life staff, by the way. Christian. Christian. No! I mean, yes.

I mean, yes. That is a prerequisite. Calling. Thank you. It's slowly coming back. Calling is the first one. I've often said, don't go into ministry because you're going in for the money because you've just made the terrible decision in your life.

That is not why you do it. You go there because God has called you to. That is, that's it. Because it's way harder than you ever thought it would be. So you only, because calling is the thing that you're going to hold on to, is the pillow that you're going to hold on to when you're crying at night time.

Calling. Aaron, can you help me out here? Competency. So that is one of them. We're not going to pick someone who is going to be terrible at the job because that doesn't serve them and it doesn't serve the people they're trying to serve.

So calling and competency. Another one is chemistry. People just want to be around you. They need to be, they need to like you. If you're a complete jerk, we're not going to hire you if we're honest because that just doesn't work.

[27 : 36] And the final one is character. Yeah, character. Because you need to be just, and I often said this, it's not about gifting. It's not about being so good at doing something so you can do it.

Here's the problem with church though. We have needs. We have music team needs. We're stuck with Paul leading us on worship every week. We need someone who can play the guitar properly. You can play the guitar properly.

You're barely Christian. Why don't you do it? That's not what we need to do. We look at the person's heart. We look at the person's character and go, is that person a man of good repute filled with the spirit?

But there is such a temptation just to put people who are good at things into places just to do things. And the cheesy quote goes, we put people into places where their gifting takes them but their character cannot keep them.

And then that's destructive. And then we see things falling apart and we wonder why. For deacons, the apostle Paul later in 1 Timothy 3 has a list, has a CV, has a job description.

[28 : 40] So later when I invite Tony up, you can just evaluate him and judge him on that list, 1 Timothy 3. The problem is we often in the church, we look for people who are smart, accomplished, gifted, and we put them into positions of leadership but we don't check 1 Timothy 3 and then we wonder why our churches are falling apart.

We have to have people who are godly, men and women who are serving. There's no point having an amazing musician like Paul but if he doesn't even come, he only comes to church 25% of the time then I'm not going to have him just play that one week because that's not what we're looking for.

It doesn't matter if you have someone who's really good at speaking and they're not willing to stack chairs after service, that's no good either. Never trust anyone who's not willing to stack chairs. I am so, so serious.

We grew up in a church where there was no one, the pastor is basically the pastor, the janitor, the administrator, the treasurer, everything. And every Sunday morning he'd do the chairs and clean up afterwards and then we come to Hong Kong where we have a team that we've hired to do those things or at least on the other side.

If you've not been to the other side, it's a wonderful church. We're in a gold building over there with tons of people who are hired to kind of look after us and they're great people but the danger is we just get them to do everything and all the responsibility goes away from us.

[30:05] So when we started this place, they were like, do we need to send side staff to come over to help you set up the chairs? I said, absolutely not. Don't deprive us of the gift of service. Don't deprive us of the chance to be able to serve other people.

So worship starts at 10 a.m. when the life groups take turns and I'm like, I watch everyone do the chairs and for some reason it's the same every week but it looks equally confusing every week. But I'm like, that's worship. That's worship. Actually, Mel's one of my favorites because she's really serious about it and she's like putting the chairs in the right places and I'm like, that's so good seeing someone worship through setting up chairs.

Please don't deprive us of that gift. And then verse 4, chapter 6, verse 4, he says this, but we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

If I look at a modern day pastor's schedule and I did a survey on where they spend most of their time, it'll be with deep, great sadness that we'll say not much of it is to do with ministering the word.

[31:18] The pressure on a modern day pastor is huge. If you look at the book of Ephesians and the fivefold offices and all the different roles that are played in the church, there's an apostle, there's a prophet, there's an administrator, there's all these other things and yet in the church we only hire pastors.

And so the pastor is asked to be your math tutor for your kid and also asked to be your marriage counselor because you guys are going through a tough thing and is asked to be the one who's going to help you take you to the doctors as well.

And suddenly the pastors are doing so many other things and we wonder why they're burning out. And then we wonder why the flock is not healthy because the pastor is not doing what he's supposed to do or she's supposed to do.

What it's supposed to be is there are people who are doing different things. So let me just side note here don't put all your expectations on our pastors. Don't put your expectations on me.

I can guarantee you I will disappoint you at some point. But also if you're sat there going man James is really hopeless at that but wait that's my gifting.

[32:24] Then please don't just sit there and go he sucks at that. Come and help. My job my commitment to you is to be devoted to the ministry of the word and to praying for all of you and to caring for you.

All the other things I'm going to need your help in. Again mission statement two. It's also 1 Corinthians 12. Everyone has a different part to play. If you're not playing the part you're missing out.

And you might say oh but I'm so busy I'm too tired. Do you know my work is just and I'll say this I know it's hard but you know if you don't do it I know it's hard and I get Hong Kong schedules especially that's tricky.

That's tricky. But if you don't do it actually you deprive yourself of the one place where you can be filled with life. Because it is better to give than to receive.

Try. Do whatever it is that you can do. I was talking to Julian about this and Julian currently is climbing Mount Kilimanjaro. I didn't know there was no height restriction so you can climb it.

[33:30] So he's climbing it right now and actually bless him I love him so much. One thing that he's doing he's in the field of law just like Nathan here is in Hong Kong and super busy and he's like James I so want to do this and do this reading plan and go and serve here and do this and that but I'm coming home at 10 and I'm doing emails until 1.

I just I want to but I can't and I say there is so much grace. If you have little just do little. If you have more do more. The key is don't hold back from him and in giving you will receive.

That's how you get fed and that's how you get filled and it's funny as soon as they assigned other people to do it verse 5 the whole gathering is pleased and so everyone's happy because everyone's doing their role instead of 10% of the people doing 90% of the work and 90% of people being unhappy now we're starting to distribute the work in the right way and everyone's happy isn't that amazing?

Can't wait to the day where we can say and the whole and it pleased the whole gathering because everyone's doing what they're supposed to do. That's the dream. That's the vision and so they bring

these guys out I'm not going to read their names these then they set and they laid hands on them they laid hands on them this wasn't hey can you help there's a bunch of hungry people can you help go now feed them no it's hey this may look like feeding people physical food but this is so much more than that so they commission them and lay their hands on them and give the favor of God and the power of God onto them because even you feeding those widows even you stacking these chairs is an act of worship and is filled with the spirit moving that's it there is no task that is too small for God to use there are not only three jobs in the whole of the church whether it's preaching or leading worship and welcome team there are way more things that we can do to serve and they are all supernatural they are all spiritual and then what the word of God it continued to increase and the number of disciples multiplied not that Stephen then became not that Stephen then hit a million followers not that then the hype around him got bigger and bigger or the disciples got bigger and bigger it's funny you look at the book of Acts those 12 their mentions get less and less because it's not about them it's about the spirit of God moving and the word of God spreading and so we see that now anyway that's me talking for now

I want to invite you invite Tony up to interview him a little bit because Tony is one of our deacons here in the church and so can we give a round of applause to Tony to come up I think Nathan's going to grab another one for us so this is Tony Tony how long have you been a deacon at this church for I started when I was 32 so I think this is coming up to be my 30th 30 years of being a deacon can you raise your hand if you are under 30 years old okay he's been he's been being a deacon more than many of you have been alive that's how faithful this man have been and it's not just him I didn't know Agnes was going to be here this Sunday because I would have dragged her up and of course Hank over there has been a deacon how long have you been a deacon for Hank? [36 : 59] 15 years so you're like a youth compared to Tony so my jokes of our age should go to this guy over here the deacon I wanted to bring up was actually Adrian wife of Rocky and she of course is on the more youthful side compared to the three musketeers that I just mentioned just to show you that there's but these are the four deacons that we have here in the English gathering they are part of a wider church deacons board that I want to just talk a little bit about but maybe the first question for you is what made you say yes to being a deacon the first time and why do you keep saying yes to being a deacon for the 32nd year?

before I forgot let me just debunk a myth that often was associated with deacon deacons don't get paid so that was that was the somehow the question that always pops in people's mind and say hey you know are you getting paid so that's not the motivation to say yes well if that doesn't convince you I don't know why will we'll take applications for deacons just at the right over there you do not get paid will you reiterate in fact in the early stages we're the ones that actually have to to give more just when we're running out of cash why did I say yes I think it was just a very short history I came to Kongfok in 80 at year of 84 when this started and then I left for living in the US in 89 I think yeah and then I came back in 92 came back in 92 that was when

I was 32 and Kongfok has split up I think that was the right word into three churches and so the amazing works of God was in play and we we now have Kongfok Tongfok in Tonghawan and then Jinfok in Jinshaji so the three suddenly got inspired people I think there was a little bit of argument in the background so the church got split into three all my friends and people that are like me actually early 30s by the way so if you're sat here in your early 30s that was Tony it looks like it was a long time ago but I just want to relate to you this is you this could be you so I left for three years and then I came back with the family and all my friends were in Tongfok so the natural thing to do was to join my friends in Tongfok right and then somehow I had a lunch with another sister in Christ and she said look and I was sharing I was like you know I didn't know what happened suddenly all my friends got split into three churches and I didn't know what to do and I need to go maybe pick one out of the three and somehow through the conversations he said well so which church do you think needed you most and not in a kind of condescending way but it was just saying okay you pick a church not because you're comfortable with people or because you know it's close to you and all of that you may want to pick a church that can benefit from your presence and that you'll be able to contribute and all of that so that was the reason why I stayed and they needed a lot of people to help because our lead pastor went to Tongfok Peter most of the other deacons the senior ones also you know got kind of split so there was a big void in terms of leadership and I said yes and say okay although if I have no idea I was the youngest guy I have no idea what to do but I'm happy and willing to try yeah wow and I for one I'm super glad that you said yes that time

and the church you've seen you've overseen the church in so many different ways and of course so yeah I did my fair share of stacking chairs you did your fair share of stacking chairs I love to cook for my family so I think I had that attribute of serving food yeah so that's what qualifies you to be yeah and then when you are part of a family you know church is a family and you see all the ups and downs of how family grew and how they argue with each other and all of that that's how I felt I was very very much close to God and although I still don't know what he wanted me to do on a daily basis but I felt like

[41 : 49] I'm close to him and I felt that through church I'm able to do at least part of the plan and the purpose that he's given me and this is not just for the English side by the way again I'll say this is just there's a much bigger side behind us which is the Chinese church and often I get asked by my friends at international church why are you still at a Chinese church they're just archaic and red tape and conservative and old fashioned and all these things and I'll say something very simple I'll say but that's just where my family is I don't think Christina and I would have survived in Hong Kong without Agnes Tony and Hank that's it there's not really much else and actually it looks bad on the outside sometimes when you look at people and you're like oh just old fashioned Chinese churches these are just these people are the most selfless faithful people that I've met and so they are here to serve and so if anyone ever thinks oh is it an evil empire over that no it is not an evil empire sometimes it can look scary

I'll tell you now Hank does look scary he looks hard on the outside but he is so soft so soft on the inside we need to know that and I wanted the chance to introduce you and actually maybe we only have two or three more minutes so maybe the big question I have for you is what do you wish people here would know about the wider church what do I wish I want to I want to just spend a little time on the evolution of church so when we started a little time yes in a minute so we started out about 40 years ago and it was as big as gathering at the time and then it grew and grew and grew we now have three different congregations English Mandarin and Cantonese Cantonese being the longest one and obviously the most people around 1500 I guess so we would do that 1500 2000 if you count all the online attendees for church so there's a evolution of that

I want this group to at least appreciate how God puts in all the blessings and the support where we grew from a church of this size into a church of the size we are and I had the privilege of getting the English ministry started seven years ago so this is like 2.0 gathering it's 2.0 English ministry and so I wish that the history and all the blessings that God has put into the Gong Fu family would continue to flourish in different ways that that's beyond our imagination and understanding I wish you all knew and how all the ups and downs I always say to new pastors and say hey that's not the worst I have seen worst honestly every time I talk to Tony it's kind of like a therapy session and he's like it could be worse it has been worse it has been much worse so when

God is putting us through these trials and tribulations there is a reason right and the Bible says that as well but it is never I mean you would feel that he had never abandoned us and so I think gathering is going to go through some hard times you know a very jammed place and Angus is always working on air conditioning and all of that and people complain about our screen so maybe there's a reason why God want us to be in the cramped area so when we do get a bigger area or like you said you know there's a way to evolve and maybe that's the reason why is there so I wish you all can appreciate that and help out as James has said thank you Tony thank you for all that you do can we give him a round of applause maybe this is a good time to have some practical sharings we are still looking for a place

Hank is working Tony's been here for so so long Agnes incredible woman I'm fairly certain that she reads the Bible more than I do partly because she signed up to a program that forces her to do it but she signed up to it and so I'm pretty sure she reads the Bible more than I do and I'm pretty sure Hank spends more time at church than I do and he lives all the way out in Saikong and so he comes out and he's the current chair of the deacons board and so he's doing a lot of things just a couple notes on that a couple things that are to do with the wider church that I think this is the time to at least share about is that the wider church does have membership Tony and Hank are the ones who teach the membership class designed maybe and for many years delivered to a very Chinese context but of course it's evolving and it's changing because actually we're members of the same church I mean if you go over there it does look very different they have more chairs more space more it's just better but we are members too so what we're trying to figure out especially as this next season of the gathering happens is actually if there are those of you here who really are like this is

my home this is my home my point to you will be well then prove it come and join us and become a member will it always be fun no

[47:40] I mean the church plants that happened most of the church plants happened around Hong Kong because of church splits because people are arguing and people are selfish that's how it always that's usually how it happens it's not easy but that's what when you become a member you're saying okay but this is just my family you know all the part of it and I'm going to sit in some of these meetings that we have and they're going to be in Cantonese and translated to Mandarin but that's part of it you see the Hellenistic Jews and the Hebrew speaking Jews this is similar just Chinese people who speak different languages all getting together why because of Jesus because this is the family that he brought us to so if that's something that you're interested in can you come and talk to me can you have the courage of Caleb and just walk up to me and go hey I think this is what I'd like and I know I'm counting the cost I know what this is actually you don't know yet right now because I haven't told you but if you're interested in finding out what the cost of it is then actually come and find me not a monetary cost by the way it's going to cost you your life in a different way can you come and find out about it maybe that on another note for me is just to share with you actually this is this

August is my last month as executive director of Young Life I'm stepping down and from there I'm coming full time to be at Kong Fook Church so that's part of the thing I don't know it's worth clapping about but that's definitely it's happening it's too late now I want to tell you what that also means I'm joining everyone here to just spending all the time supporting leading the church here but there's also another side in the church there's a much bigger side in the church that speaks Cantonese and there's Explorers which is the youth ministry there's RML which is the young adults ministry and there's the children's district which is enormous I want to be helping oversee those things too and so pray for me need your prayers pray for my family even more than what you can pray for me and it's a journey and there are going to be no solutions and it's not going to be an overnight change that suddenly makes everything better but it's going to be part of this together and finally just if you're thinking about well how do I give and how do I scatter there's stuff over there there's plenty of stuff over there but there's also

KFCC the care centre that Agnes talked about a few months ago in Aberdeen not too far from where Kelly lives where we want to go and support and pour out to the community and actually that's a church initiative now we need people who teach English we need physios that we still need to talk about we need we need people who are just willing to come and do different classes with the local people on this in Aberdeen and Wachohang area so just interested in that I'll tell you this we're going to try and figure out something we have lots of different things going on in church there's a group going to the Congo Erica and Aidan and Godfrey you guys and a few others are going to the Congo there's the group going to the Philippines there's a group that came to the Young Lives Teen Moms Camp in June there's a whole group that came to Young Life Camp in July that was super fun there are there's a whole group that goes on a Saturday morning to go and serve in a prison things are happening but I know for sure there are those of you who are sat here like yeah but I'm not doing anything well then join us and maybe we need to do better at coming up with church wide things that maybe are easier for you to come and sign up to just as a starter so these are the things it's a bit of an update in regards to church and membership and I hope that you will continue to pray for us my question is this and this is where I'll finish and I think we might have time

Paul to finish with the song why did Jesus put this passage here why did the Holy Spirit put this passage in Acts 6 here talking about just the needs there's needs everywhere but why did they show this I think if we use even borrow the DBS Bible study question methods then he's trying to show us different things what's he trying to show us about people the people are selfish the people gravitate towards people who are just like them but we should go out of our comfort zones and hang out with people who are not the same that's what's he trying to get us to do he's trying to mobilize us so here's the question what are you doing to serve what gifts do you have or what gifts do you need to grow because you actually have them but maybe you think oh but I'm not good enough but then I say well let's grow it together it's not going to grow if you're just by sitting on the couch you're going to have to try and practice you should ask Christina the first time I preached she said oh she'll tell you it was terrible and now it's just a little less terrible but you've got a gift that you need to grow so that's what it's saying and what does this passage tell us about God that he cares for those on the fringe that there is a dividing wall of hostility as though in Ephesians 2 and that we

remember that we are one time was separated from him that we had no hope and without God but he became peace to those who were far off and to those who are near Jesus says to both sides the rich the poor the left the right the Hellenistic Jews and the Hebrew speaking Jews has come to the middle by my blood you will be united that the wall that dividing wall of hostility will now be broken down through my body through the cross the cross is the thing that unites us all together it reconciles us all together the cross tears down the walls that are between people the cross causes to work together the cross is the one that says there is no insider outsider anymore there is no cool and uncool anymore we all fall short of the glory of God but we are all justified freely by his grace as a gift would you come and be united with the person sat next to you even if they are different why because of the cross I'll finish with this quote N.T.

[53:29] Wright says this in Christ the middle wall of partition is torn down the church that tolerates ethnic or economic barriers mocks the cross let us be a people that looks to the other that is all let's let's pray and I'll invite Paul to come up Jesus we know that you you said you tear down the temple and you rebuild it in three days what we didn't realize is the temple would be in us they would be here dwelling among us that you have made your dwelling place in us that you are now the cornerstone you are the head of this church and you care for the fringe you hate division you care about the needs of your children and you call us to serve just as the first deacons did but you don't tell us to do anything that you weren't willing to do yourself you are the servant king you came and not to be served but to serve so would your spirit guide us now show us what it is that we need to do not just because we want to be good people but we serve because our king our lord our saviour served and the ultimate act of service the ultimate act of love by giving us yourself onto the cross and dying for us breaking down every wall we dare not mock the cross we seek to only live appropriately respond accordingly which is radically which is selflessly help us love the other Jesus would you be the center and the head of our church

Jesus one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that you are lord you are the saviour of the world you are the head of this church and it is all about you it's not about what we can do or will do it's about what you did and who you are we make you the center thank you lord in your name we pray amen