



How To Solve A Big Problem

By

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How do you solve big problems? Find someone who is **successful** at solving them and do what they do.

The apostles of Jesus Christ faced a big problem in Jerusalem – **dissension** in the fellowship. It had the potential of slowing the progress of their primary ministries of prayer and preaching the Gospel.

“Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.” Acts 6:1

It's interesting to note that prior to Acts 6 the apostles had been imprisoned and beaten. The leaders of Israel commanded the apostles not to speak in the name of Jesus, then let them go. The apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus and spent every day in the temple, and in every house, teaching and preaching that Jesus was Israel's promised Messiah (Christ). The apostles were doing exactly what their Lord had told them to do, so when complaints of mistreatment from the Hellenist (Greek speaking) Jews rose in their growing fellowship, they knew it was something they needed to address quickly and wisely. Jesus had taught His apostles the importance of unity and the dangers of disunity, so they knew that this dissension could become a major problem.

How did they solve it? Based on what we read about these 12 apostles, they prayed about it – together. They asked the Holy Spirit for the best answer. What they faced was not a small problem. It was personal. The Jewish believers from Greek speaking nations complained that the Jewish believers from Israel were neglecting to take care of the Hellenist widows in the daily distribution of food. Jews born in Israel had long thought of themselves as superior to Jews who were born in other countries. In turn, Jews from other nations resented the way they were looked down upon and overlooked. However, the message Jesus taught the apostles was to love others as themselves. Here’s a quick look at the history of the Jewish assembly to remember how it began:

“Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Acts 2:44-47

That was the ideal – all believers were together, and had all things in common. They sold what they owned and divided it among themselves so everyone had what they needed. They continued daily with one accord in the temple and ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, and the Lord blessed them with people being

saved every day. So, what happened to that simplicity of heart? Why did the Hellenists complain against their Hebrew brothers? We can call it by a variety of names, but the simple fact is that **sin** raised its ugly head in the fellowship. It may have been simple neglect on the part of the Hebrew believers or they may have purposely overlooked the Hellenist widows. It may have been real concern for their widows by the Hellenists or it may have been jealousy or anger that drove them to complain about the neglect. Whatever it was had the potential of disrupting the powerful movement of God in Jerusalem. The apostles realized that this problem could have interrupted their calling to preach the Word of God.

“Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.’ Acts 6:2

As we will see, the apostles had met together, prayed together, sought God’s will together, then decided what to do. The Holy Spirit had given them the solution to their problem.

“Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” Acts 6:3-4

What a wonderful idea! The apostles knew what Jesus had called them to do and they were going to stand strong for their calling. It’s very helpful to know where you stand with God and what He wants

you to do. Having that settled in your heart and mind will help you solve many, many problems in the future. My tendency is to say ‘yes’ when asked to help people in one way or another and that has led to many challenges through the years. Knowing what God has called me to do helps me say ‘no’ to good things that will take me away from God’s primary calling in my life. Serving food to the Hellenist widows was a good and necessary thing to do, but it was not what Jesus had called the apostles to do. They realized that and asked for His wisdom – and wisdom they received.

Telling someone to solve their own problem is not helpful. In fact, it often communicates to people that you don’t care about them and their problem. That would not have been a wise solution. Neither would it have been wise for the apostles to do the work of serving tables. What the apostles did was show the community of Hellenist believers that they cared very much about their widows by demonstrating a prayerful and considered response. “... seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business ...” The apostles showed that the ministry to the Hellenist widows was important and they gave them specific directions about how to handle it. The people would find seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and the apostles would appoint them to the work.

Let me stop here for a minute to share some thoughts about appointments in the Church and how they can impact the ability of Christians to solve problems quickly and wisely. I love the simplicity of our Lord's message. It's not complicated. He's the Master – we are His servants. He is the Savior – we belong to Him. God is our Father – we are His children. Nice and simple – clear and easy to understand. Problems are easier to solve in a simple system. Jesus is Lord. He called people to follow Him. He appointed some of His followers to be leaders. Those leaders are known as apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. The job of those leaders is to equip followers of Christ for the work of **their** ministries and for the edifying of the entire Body of followers. Simple and effective. In the business world, it's called Flat Organization or Flat Management (also called Horizontal Management) – few, if any, levels of management between staff and managers. There is no distance between leaders and followers, so problems can be addressed quickly and effectively. Leaders approve solutions and delegate authority to the people immediately. That's what we see in the way the apostles solved this big problem in Jerusalem.

What I have trouble with is the complexity of the Lord's message as presented to the world by the Church today. As we study Church history, we see the system of leadership go from Horizontal to Vertical Management within a few centuries. Church leaders developed layers of oversight that put a greater distance between them and followers of Christ, and even worse, a greater distance between the followers and Christ. Even with many Church councils

and massive reforms during the last 1,700 years, the world views Christianity as a religious system gasping for air in the 21st Century. And what about Christ's followers? So many of them are confused about what they believe about their relationship to God, that their confusion has led to dormancy in fellowship and ministry. Confusion is paralyzing. When people don't know what to do, they often do nothing. Those who do something often do the wrong thing. Who should we blame for that? The people in the pews? God in Heaven? I think followers of Christ have some responsibility in this, but the greater responsibility goes to those who God called to lead His people. It's the job of leaders to lead God's people toward God – not toward themselves or their personal doctrine or pet projects or favorite institutions. Good leaders are first good followers – they follow Jesus closely and faithfully, then they know where to go and how to lead others there.

So, what should we do to make sure that our churches have the ability to solve big problems? Return to the simplicity of God's original plan. God has always called people to be close to Him. The earliest picture we have of God and the first human being is of God creating Adam with His hands and breathing into him the breath of life. Next, we see God placing Adam in the beautiful Garden of Eden to enjoy it and care for it. God brought all of the animals and birds to Adam so he could name them. God placed Adam into a deep sleep, took out one of Adam's ribs and created a wife for him. Do you see how personal and loving this early relationship was between God and man? God created man to have a loving relationship with him. Sin

came between God and man and the distance grew as the sin grew. When Jesus came to earth to teach, preach, and die for sin, He introduced God's original system of creative relationship. It would be close and personal. Just as Jesus the Great Creator walked with Adam in the Garden of Eden, so Jesus the Great Savior walked with those who followed Him when He was on earth. When Jesus prepared His disciples for His death, resurrection, and departure to Heaven, the Lord told them He would give them the Holy Spirit to help and comfort them. The Spirit of God would be so close to them that He would actually be "in" them. God's Spirit protects and provides for those who follow Christ. There was no distance between Christ and his followers 2,000 years ago, and there should be no distance now.

The apostles' solution to the problem of feeding the Hellenist widows was brilliant. The Lord called apostles to equip His followers for the work of their ministries, for the edifying of the entire Body of followers. That's what the apostles did in Acts 6. They equipped the Hellenist believers to solve their own problem and the people loved it.

"And the saying pleased the whole multitude." Acts 6:5

Everyone saw the wisdom in the apostles' solution – both Hebrews and Hellenists. They immediately got to work finding the right people for the job.

"And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas,

a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.” Acts 6:5-6

They saw the needs of the Hellenist widows and brought them to the apostles. The apostles prayed for the men and laid hands on them as part of appointing them to the ministry. What was the outcome of that decision?

“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

The seven men ministered to the widows and the 12 apostles continued in prayer and preaching the Word. Because of that, the Word of God spread and the number of people who followed Jesus multiplied “greatly” in Jerusalem. In fact, a great many priests were obedient to the faith! That was amazing in light of what it meant for those priests to become followers of Jesus. Many, if not all, would have lost their positions as priests and become a disgrace to their families and friends. God blessed the Jerusalem fellowship greatly because of how the apostles stayed true to their calling and message.

This solution met the needs of believers so well that it became a permanent part of God’s plan for His people. The Apostle Paul addressed the Philippian church this way many years later: “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and

deacons.” Paul also wrote about deacons and their requirements in his letter to Timothy. The position of deacon is still important to the Church to this day.

If you want to solve a big problem in your life, in your church, in your ministry – look to God and His Word. The apostles dealing with dissension in Jerusalem is just one example of how to solve big problems wisely, quickly, and effectively. Search out the Scriptures and you will find so many other wonderful examples you can use. Remember, solving big problems is part of serving God and bringing glory to His Wonderful Name.

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