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Living Life Together by Solving Problems Quickly

- How do you decide if you are going to fix something to throw it away?
 - for example, let's say you're making a couple of pieces of toast and our \$20 toaster catches on fire...
 - so you unplug it, and then do whatever you're supposed to do – spray it with a fire extinguisher, immerse it in dishwater in the sink, open the window and throw it outside—whatever is appropriate...
 - but after the fire is out—what is the likelihood that you will take it to a repair place to get it fixed as opposed to just buying a new one?...
- then compare that to driving your new car and running over a nail or something and getting a flat tire...
 - so you get out and here's your brand new car with a flat?...
 - do you take the same steps you did with your toaster?...
 - do you push it over the nearest ravine and go buy a new one?...
- assuming the answer to that is no – that takes us back to our original question – how do you decide if you're going to fix something or throw it away?...
- there are several answers to that question, isn't there?...
 1. One is – how much do you value the item?...
 - a \$20,000 car is worth a whole more than a \$20 toaster...
 - so would we all agree with this premise – your willingness to put effort into fixing something reveals how much you value that item in your heart...
 2. Then there's the issue of whether anyone has the ability to fix it, and how does the cost compare to the overall value?...
 - so if someone could reliably fix your toaster for a quarter, you might actually take them up on the offer...
 - conversely, if there was no one on the face of the earth who could fix the flat on your car, or if the repair cost \$40,000—that changes the equation...
- so you have the issue of how much you value the item in the first place...
- then you have to determine...can it even be fixed, and if so, at what price?...
- no, we're not really here to talk about toasters or flat tires...but we are here to talk about the church of Jesus Christ and how we go about the business of **Living Life Together**...
- and here's the question – how much effort should we put into fixing problems in the church?...
 - does God value it enough, and have God's people valued it enough historically, and should we value it enough now..to do what we have to do to solve problems when they arise among God's family?...
 - and is that even possible?...can problems be solved...and at what expense?...and what is the ratio of the value of the church to cost of solving problems?...
- with all of that in mind, let me invite you to open your Bible to Acts chapter 6...page 96 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- our annual theme this year is Living Life Together – so one of the ways we're trying to emphasize that idea is by studying through the book of Acts...because that is the first history of Christ's church...

- and the goal is to look at the way they lived life together then...to learn everything we can about how we should live life together now...
- before we jump into the passage that is before us this morning – let me ask you this in a more general way...
- what steps have you taken so far this year to implement the theme we've been studying from various places in the Word of God?...
 - this is all about understanding that God has designed his church to be a family...a group of people who are growing together in their love for Him and their love for one another...
 - it's about being connected, and creating the kind of environment where others find it easy to be connected by being welcomed into the body and finding this a comfortable, inviting place to quickly build relationships with others...
 - my question for you is – how have you tried to implement it?...
- and this is a great time to have this chat – early August – summer is coming to a close...
 - still great opportunities to practice summertime hospitality...have you done that?...could you do more of that even in the next couple of weeks perhaps with someone you'd like to get to know?....
 - opportunities to welcome folks who have moved into our community this summer and are visiting our church...why not sporadically take someone to lunch this afternoon?...
 - opportunities to welcome all our out of town college students back to church in a couple of weeks...
 - opportunities to be inviting others to come to church as we have more room because of our fourth service firing up next week?...
 - my question is – is there evidence that you have made progress in Living Life Together?...because you're more connected and you're helping others be more connected?...
- now, here's what's going to happen today...this is yet another one of those “this proves the historicity of the Scripture” type passages...we've pointed that out all along the way...
 - no one could say the leaders of the church were spreading a false message to make themselves look good and one that also covered over any problems that might be associated with becoming a follower of Christ...
 - quite the opposite...a couple of weeks ago we thought our way through the many ways Scripture made the human leader of the early church in the first half of the book of Acts, the apostle Peter, look incredibly bad...over and over and over...
 - there's also the issue of how Luke, the writer of this book, practiced full disclosure about how our adversary the devil was trying to oppose the church from day one...
 - so there was the beginning of external persecution and Peter and the other apostles have been imprisoned and threatened and beaten...
 - then was the attempt to destroy the church from the inside by members like Ananias and Saphira behaving in ways that were dishonest and hypocritical...but the Lord addressed that quickly and decisively...and the body continues to grow...
 - so much so, that the last count we heard was that there were 5000 men in the church...meaning with women and children---we're probably talking about a group of 20,000 or more...
- so what happens next...
 - it's time for a good old fashioned dispute...a problem that arises in the church...
 - and what we're going to find out pretty quickly is whether the church of Jesus Christ is like a \$20 toaster that just caught on fire and really needs to be thrown out the window...or

like a \$20,000 car that has a flat tire – a problem, but something that certainly be fixed if people will roll up their sleeves and get down to business...

- read Acts 6:1-7...

- we're talking this morning about **Living Life Together by Solving Problems Quickly**...and with the time we have remaining, let's look for **3 principles to help us know how to respond when problems arise.**

I. Understand that Problems Frequently Occur in Christ's Church

- you have to love the fact that the Bible includes this particular story because it is such a garden variety kind of issue that anyone who has been around a church for any period of time would say – “yep, I can see that happening”...

- now let's break it down a little bit...

A. Especially if the church family is experiencing numerical growth.

- **Acts 6:1 - Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose...**

- what we're reading about here would not have been an issue if only a few people were coming to Christ...

- but you can just imagine the administrative issues that would be involved in accomplishing the simple functions we've already read about in the book of Acts that the church was involved in...in light of this explosive growth...

- and if you're not careful, you can actually be frustrated by the problems instead of thankful for the growth...

- they are seeing the accomplishment of the mission they received in Acts 1:8 walked out before their very own eyes in a relatively short period of time...

- and that happens, doesn't it?...

- some of you were part of this church family when the decision was made to relocate here from south 18th street...

- so it took years to find the property, and deal with the site development issues...

- there were challenges with the septic system...challenges with the size of the sign...and on and on and on...

- finally the building was done and church relocated here with a group of about 400 people...

- and the new building was designed for about 600 and everyone could finally breathe a corporate sigh of relief because there was an unlimited amount of room for growth...

- not exactly, and within a couple of years we were out of parking and God helped us miraculously solve that problem with the purchase of additional land that at the time seemed absolutely impossible...

- then we needed to go to two services...and then knock out the walls of the auditorium...and then go the three services...

- and along the way start a Christian school, and develop and expand our counseling ministry, and then start all sorts of outreach ministries, and then build the community center and start a seminary...

- much of that flowed out of responding to problems and challenges associated with growth...

- and if we're not careful – we become frustrated with the problems instead of stepping back and remembering that the challenges are actually the result of God's blessings upon us...

- I'm sure we'll have some rough spots next week when we launch our fourth service...but the fact that we are doing that is good news...we are living in Acts 6:1 in a lot of ways...
 - which is why I want to challenge every person here to invite someone to come to church with you next week...
 - the beautiful feeling of having more room...

B. In their case, because of what appeared to be purposeful neglect.

- **Acts 6:1 - Now at this time while the disciples were increasing *in number*, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic *Jews* against the *native Hebrews*, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of *food*.**
 - Hellenistic Jews were men and women of Jewish descent but who lived outside of Israel...so they spoke Greek...they used the Greek translation of the OT...a book known as the Septuagint...etc.
 - but they would have been in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost and they had come to trust in Christ as Savior and Lord and had apparently decided to stay in Jerusalem for a period of time...and that meant that there was a group of widows who had to be fed, to be cared for...
 - and the Hellenistic Jews believed that their widows were being neglected...
 - they saw it as some sort of an ethnic shun...
- so the apostles had a very important decision to make...is the church like a \$20 toaster that just caught on fire and isn't worth repairing....or a \$20,000 car with a flat tire...
- what they were about to do goes a long way to showing how much they valued the church of Jesus Christ...
- now, push the pause button on this for a moment...

C. In our case

- problems, real or imagined, arise in every church...
- even there was a perfect church...do you realize it was cease being so...the moment...you walked in?...
- when you think about it – the way Christ is mediating His plan and program in this age is astonishing...
- having a volunteer organization comprised of all sorts of different people from every conceivable ethnic group and economic background being in charge of accomplishing the mission of glorifying God by winning people to Jesus Christ and equipping them to be more faithful disciples?...what an incredible trust...
- but if we have the view that every time a problem arises, the church isn't worth the effort involved in solving the issue – then we are choosing to be markedly different than the leaders of the early church...
- apparently it came as no surprise to them whatsoever that problems would be part of the equation...
- by the way, in a broader context, that is true of any human endeavor...the principles we are seeing walked out here are ones that can help us in all sorts of organizations and relationships...
- and one question we should all ask is – are we mentally prepared when a challenge arises among God's people, and what does our response say about how much value we place on the church family?...

II. Be Convinced that Problems are for Solving.

- that is true is practically any endeavor in life...
- sure, there are rare times when you have to cut your losses, I understand that...
- but it is amazing how frequently someone runs away from a problem at the very time that God wants to stretch and mature that person in order to prepare him/her for greater effectiveness...
- you'll never get there unless you are convinced that problems are for solving...

A. They summoned the congregation.

- Acts 6:2 - So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples...
- one of my pastor friends recently wrote a blog entitled "congregational government is of the devil"...
- several of you sent me that blog and asked what I thought...and I understand where my friend was coming from in the sense that some churches are just hamstrung because ever issue has to come before the congregation and people are so mired down with business that there is no time for ministry...
- but here's a clear example of where the church family was involved...the issue of selecting their leaders...
- and we will see other times in later chapters in the book of Acts where the congregation is clearly and powerfully involved in the decisions that are made...
- but notice what happens next...

B. They clearly stated the problem.

- **Acts 6:2 - So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables..."**
- now, what didn't they do?...
- they didn't attack the people who raised the issue...sometimes the mailman gets shot...they didn't do that...
- they didn't throw in the towel...this is too hard...I'm just going to quit and walk away...
- they didn't try to justify themselves or blame the problem on someone else...
- but nor did they consider a solution that would make them move away from their God-given priorities...
- here's what's at stake here – we would have to neglect the Word of God if we personally became more involved in this issue...
- and since that is not an option for anyone here...we have to find a solution somewhere else...
- now they're certainly not saying that they are too good to serve tables...they're just saying that there is the potential for that to happen if they're not careful...
- there is a huge lesson here about priorities in the church...and I'm glad for a church family that understands this...
- as things have grown and become more complex here...I appreciate that folks understand that I'm not going to be everywhere or do everything...
- we have a great staff but more importantly a marvelous army of trained volunteers...that frees me up, and our other pastoral staff members, to focus on studying the Word and praying...there would never be a legitimate reason for any of us to walk into the pulpit unprepared...

- now – please push the pause button on this one – how would you rate yourself on the issue of being able to clearly state what the problem is?...
- because for many folks, they are so busy blaming others, or justifying themselves...nothing is ever solved...

C. They suggested a clear, practical, workable solution.

Acts 6:3-6 - Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

- what a perfect example of how problems are to be solved in the church...
- let's focus on solutions...
- and one lesson I have learned from thousands of hours of counseling here is that many people really struggle with the ability to be solution oriented...
 - it is much easier to run away...
 - it is much easier to pitch a fit...
 - it is far easier to be a drama queen...
 - it much easier to start blame shifting...
- but you show much you value the church...or whatever relationship we're talking about...by hanging in there and brainstorming solutions...
- and here's the point – that is often how maturity is developed...learning to communicate and solve problems together...
- that's why Paul would later tell the believers in Rome...
- **Romans 5:1-5 - Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.**

D. This solution is still serving Christ's church today.

- many people believe that this passage is where the office of deacon is instituted...
- the word is not actually used as a noun...but diaconos [deacon in English] means servant, and the verb form is at the end of verse 2...it is not desire for us to neglect the Word of God and serve tables...
- and since later in the NT, when the qualifications for church leaders are given in places like 1 Timothy 3 – there are two offices mentioned – pastor (or elder/bishop – the words are used interchangeably) and deacon...
- and when you look at the way our church is organized...it is amazing how this simple solution in Acts 6 continues to be effective...

1. Because of the important qualifications.

- you noticed in Acts 6 – the issue was...choose men who possess a certain character...it was not in any way, shape, or form a popularity contest...
- **Acts 6:3 - Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom...**
- that is one of the most important functions of our church family every year...
 - so the congregation has an important place in this...but there's balance...

2. Their tasks were assigned by the apostles

- **Acts 6:3 - Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.**

3. What do deacons do today?

- the overall issue is serving – the office of deacon is a serving role...the problem in many churches is when men are placed in the position who want to make decisions but who don't want to serve...
- no one should be a decision maker unless he is first a disciple maker...

- a. Oversee a deacon's care list
- b. Serve on one or more of the deacon committees
- c. Are on the front line of defense for addressing the physical needs
- d. Help people on their lists grow and serve
- e. Help formulate ministry decisions
- f. Help oversee financial decisions

- when's the last time you expressed appreciation to your deacon?...
- **1 Timothy 3:13 - For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.**

- now, what was the net effect?...

III. Believe the Solving Problems Often Leads to Greater Effectiveness.

Acts 6:7 - The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.