

Introduction

Good morning. Hey... I'm glad you all braved the weather this morning to come out for worship. We are glad you are here today. We are in a series called "Release," and it's from the Book of Acts in the Bible. So if you're trying to find the Book of Acts in your Bible, it's the fifth Book... after Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John... in the New Testament. The Bible is broken down into two major sections: The Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament introduces us to a holy God... as Creator, as Sovereign... and His relationship to mankind and how He is setting apart for Himself a people for His purposes and then promising a Redeemer for all of mankind. Then in the New Testament, we get to see that promised Redeemer come in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We see how we are to relate to one another, how we are to relate to God, and how we are to relate to unbelievers in the world. So that is what the New Testament shows us. So the Book of Acts is the early Church getting started. Jesus has ascended back into heaven. He sent the Holy Spirit and basically is like, "Get after it, followers." That is what we see in the Book of Acts, and that is where we are going to be this morning... in chapter 6 and a little bit in chapter 13. Let me pray for us, and then we will dive right in there.

"God, thank You so much for today. We thank You for, again, any kind of change in weather. God, I know that it can be catastrophic, but everything in the world that we cannot control is a reminder that we are not in charge, and it is an opportunity to look to You, who is sovereign and who is in control. So God we trust You, we love You, and we thank You for this time this morning to gather together and to open Your Word. And God, I pray that, as Your Spirit has inspired this Word, that Your Spirit would also communicate this truth to our hearts and minds this morning that we might be changed, that we might be encouraged, we might be convicted, we might be ministered to... God, however You see fit. And we ask these things in the name of Jesus. Amen."

So the title for this morning's message is "Growing Pains." I went through a few different titles that were more alliterative... which is kind of a pastoral thing to do, even though they didn't teach me that in seminary to use the same letter for every word in your title and make it kind of catchy. I had some different variations of that, and then yesterday I thought... "Growing Pains" It's an opportunity to reference an '80s TV show. Why would I pass that up? (Laughter) It also kind of applies, but I thought that any chance I get to reference '80s entertainment, I will probably take that. If you want to show me that smile again... we can look at Growing Pains together today in Acts chapter 6.

If you've been tracking along with what's happening in Acts, the Church is growing. The Gospel is spreading. More and more people are coming to faith because the Gospel is true... Jesus is real... and what's happening is that people are seeing that. They are seeing that as true; their hearts are being transformed, so they are joining this movement that's not just a fad. It is transformational. It is new life coming to people who are spiritually dead. So, of course, that's going to spread. As more and more people get involved, things get more complicated. That's what happens when more people get involved with anything. If you have been in any kind of profession that interacts with people a lot, you may have heard the joke that work would be great if it weren't for all the people... educators, managers... but I can assure you that your church staff has **never** uttered that sentiment in the 16 years that I've been on staff here. We love every minute of serving you, alongside of you, and listening to you... we **love** every second of it... (Laughter) it's never been any kind of hard time at all... at all... I don't know where that adage came from. It has not proven true in my experience. When more people join an organization or join any kind of gathering, you bring more points of view, more difference of opinion, more background, more context, more ideas... and there is opportunity for conflict. So that naturally is occurring as the Church in

Acts is starting to grow. We start to see opportunity for conflict. What an exciting passage to come with this morning. Everything until today has been the Spirit moving, tongues of fire, people speaking in different languages and people being healed and people being locked up for their faith and standing strong... and today is "Ohh... potential church split. Cool... I'll take that one, and we'll just knock this out of the park with probably the most 'Baptist' passage in Acts." (Laughter) Sorry, guys... I am one. I'm not trying to offend anyone. But the Spirit is in this passage too, so we thank the Lord for that.

So let's take a look at what can happen when conflict goes poorly. You've heard, I'm sure, stories of church splits. You may have been a part of a church split. Sometimes they are over very serious, intense, essential theological issues. I read about one this week that actually was so nasty that it went to litigation, that the two sides of this church split were suing each other over rights to the property and the buildings, and all that kind of stuff. They went to the courts, and the courts actually sent them back to denominational leadership to settle it outside of court. And when they investigated these things further, what they found was that it all started and was triggered when an elder in the church was served a smaller slice of ham than a child sitting next to him... yeah. Now, there was probably more to it than that, but that was the event that triggered these two sides. Like the Hatfields and the McCoys... "We can't remember why we are fighting, but we know we hate the other guy." That's what can happen if you let conflict go unchecked... if you don't handle it in a healthy way... if you don't respond to it in the way that God would have us respond to it. So let's look at a good example of conflict resolution and what God has put in place here... as those who follow Him, seek Him. So we're in Acts 6, verses 1 through 7...

"Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, this complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. 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 of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set 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 became obedient to the faith."

So you can see in verse 7 that what they end up doing to handle the problem or the conflict that arose, did not slow down the mission of the Church... that God has a plan for His Church, He had a plan for the Gospel, He had a plan for the Kingdom to continue to expand. Then we see that this hiccup did not slow them down. We want to look at what they did... what happens here amidst the growing pains... to allow for the ministry to continue moving forward. It's only natural that after, again Acts 1 through 5, with all this explosive growth and all these things that are happening... more and more people coming... that there is opportunity for conflict to creep in. We don't know if this complaint was Satan actively working to divide the Church and sew discord, or if it was just people in the Church not surrendering to the Holy Spirit and just walking in the flesh and not walking by faith to handle the problem. And it's an actual problem. There are widows being neglected. Instead of a good walk through that, it says that "...a complaint arose..." Your translation may say "a murmur" or "a buzz"... In Greek, that's actually an onomatopoeia which is just a fun word. If you remember, an onomatopoeia is a word that sounds like what it is... so "buzz"... if something is buzzing it makes a buzz, like, "Oh... that sounds like what it is..." What if everything was called that? Like if you needed a hammer... "Can I borrow the thump, thump?" (Laughter) We would probably run out of words, I think, because everything would sound the same. In Greek it's "goggysmos" I

guess that word "goggysmos" is... if people are murmuring and chattering and people are disgruntled and there's a bunch of people talking... it's "goggysmos, goggysmos, goggysmos..." That's the word used here that is not a positive connotation. There's a negative murmuring, a complaint that comes up. It's not just, "Hey... we have an issue. This is a problem here." But there's starting to be some bitterness seep in because of this problem. So the Hellenists... which are the Greek-speaking Jews... they are Jewish by race but they have been scattered... when the Jews were kicked out of where they used to live so they have adopted the Greek culture and Greek language, and yet they are racially Jewish but culturally they are Greek. They are grumbling because their widows are not being taken care of, so the twelve gather the Church together and propose an idea for a new wave of men to serve everyone... so everyone gets taken care of, and the Church leaders can focus on preaching and teaching. Many people believe this is the introduction of the office of deacon in the Church. It is an appointed, ordained office within the Church, but it is distinguished from the teaching elders and leaders of the Church. It is a serving role in the Church. So a lot of people would say this is the birth of the office of deacon in the congregation.

1. Requires Releasing Work.

So we see that the first thing that growing pains requires... that we must release work to move forward. We must release work. The operation has grown too big for the current personnel... the org chart is about to create another layer here, so people can move forward. Again, this is a pivotal point in the life of the Church. They can hold together and figure out a way to move forward, or they could have said, "You know what? We are going to go start First Hellenist Church of Jerusalem. You guys keep doing your thing and we are going to do our thing." And that's going to be the first denominational split right there... but they didn't. They found a way to overcome the differences, the barriers, and to move forward as one body in Christ... as God has intended for us to work together as His people.

A) The Church leaders had to release some work to a new group.

But before they could release the work, we have to identify a few things here. They had to release work to new workers. You have to let go of some things so that you're not in charge of it all, if you're being overwhelmed. In order to protect the teaching ministry, the leaders of the church could not take on the serving ministry. In Acts 6, they recognized this. They said, "Oh yes... this is a problem, and we can't handle that, so we need more people." But it's really common in churches today for pastors to try to take on too much and try to do all... for everyone... all of the time. It's not healthy. There are also churches that expect too much from their pastors and want them to do all, for everyone, all of the time... and they just cannot do that.

One of the reasons that I'm thankful to be able to preach this passage is that I can take this moment to defend our pastor... because he wouldn't do this, I don't think, from this passage or on this platform. But we, as a church and leadership, need to protect him and his ministry. He cannot do everything for all people all of the time. His personality wants to, but he cannot do that. So it is up to us... it is up to him to release work. He knows... and that's a struggle for him... to release work to other people, but it's also on us to not demand too much of him or other church leaders, but to understand that we all bear this burden together... because if ministers are spread too thin, the ministry suffers and the minister suffers. And we are also keeping others from exercising their gifts and abilities within the church. So work has to be released for us the move forward.

This is a foundational shift. It is simply recognizing that God's vision for His Church is bigger than our vision for our Church. For a church staff or current ministry team leaders or teachers to hold onto ministry as if we are in control or can handle all that God wants to do is short sighted and it lacks faith... I'm guilty of this all of the time. To think, "Oh... this is what we are going to get done because that's all that we can handle." ...that may not be what God wants. He wants more. And so if He wants more, it's not "Then I've just got to destroy myself to get this done." It is we have to have more people come along to accomplish God's mission for our Church. So it's an act of faith to release work, for sure.

I want us to ask ourselves... if you are a church leader or a ministry team member or a teacher of any kind... are you holding onto too much? Are you trying to do more than you can... than God has apportioned for you? Recognize that there are others that we need to release work to. I struggle with this... "It's not going to get done the way that I would do it..." so I struggle with letting go of things. It's a control issue for me. "I would have done it this way, and I want it to be done that way, so I can't give this up to someone else." We have to get over those things to say, "If I'm holding back the mission of God, then I am the problem... I am in the way. I need to find someone that I can release this work to."

B) Releasing work requires identifying the next wave of workers.

If we can finally admit that the work is bigger than us, the next thing we need to do is then identify that new wave of workers. "Who is that next group? Who are those men and women who need to step into work that are not working?" That's partly on us who are currently in leadership but also on those who are not yet serving. Both need to recognize the need and step into that. There is plenty of work to go around, and we don't own the work anyway. It's God's grace that He has invited us into this work, and we extend that grace to others when we release that work for them as well.

There's another common saying in ministry which is actually borrowed from an economic phrase... the Pareto Principle... which I just discovered this week because I wondered "Where did this idea come from?" But the 20/80 rule... there's this idea or saying that 20% of the people in the church do 80% of the work. And if you're like me, you need to boil that down to a very simple mindset. So if we have a church of 100 adults, they are saying that 20 of those adults do 80% of the work... the leading, the serving, the ministry... and the other 80 adults in that church just consume and observe and take part. That is not what God has intended for His Church. That's not what God has intended for His people. So, as leaders need to take initiative and identify that next wave of workers, other believers need to identify themselves as, "I can work. I need to do this." It's pretty common for a minority of the people to do the majority of the serving, even if it's not 80/20... it's always a bigger percentage that is not serving than is serving. But this is not what we see laid out in Scripture.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12, says that the Church is like a body made up of many members and each with their own part to play... each with their own role in moving the Body forward, connected to one another. To try to be a member of the Body without any connection to the Church or other parts of the Body is crazy. Sometimes people consider themselves members of a church, but all they do is come and consume and observe and go home. That's not the idea of membership that we see in Scripture. That's the idea of membership we have... if we're like, "Oh yeah... I'm a member of Costco so I get discounted big-screen TVs and cheap chicken bakes for lunch and walk around and grab some free samples and I'm good to go." That's not the type of membership we see in Scripture. We see a family member as being a member of a Church. Membership means knowing others and being known. It means loving others and being

loved. It means giving and serving. It means being held accountable. It sounds more like a family than Costco. Right? That's what Church membership is about as well.

In 1 Peter 4 [verse 10], Peter says that each believer is to serve others with the gift or gifts that God has given them, and to not do so makes us poor stewards of the gifts that we have been given. We have been gifted to serve others. It's not like, "Oh, if I start to serve then God will give me a gift to use." No... if you are a believer in Christ, you have a gift, and if you are not serving you are not using the gift, and that's poor management of the gift that God has given you. He has given it to you to serve others. None of the gifts are given to edify ourselves. They are given to serve others.

So God's Church needs workers... but who can do the work? This is important. Who can do the work? The Hebrews in Acts 6 were reaching across cultural lines to the Hellenists in appointing workers. So the Hebrews are Jewish by race and Jewish by custom. They have been in Jerusalem and held onto the Jewish culture. Now both of these groups in this passage are believers in Jesus Christ. They are both Christians but racially Jewish, but one is culturally Jewish and one is culturally Greek... hopefully we are tracking along with all of that. But the different cultures didn't stop them or exclude them from serving in the Church. There's actually a benefit in this case because that's where the problem was. We need someone to minister to the Greeks who are coming for help... those of Greek culture... and so we need those who are of the Greek culture to reach across those cultural lines. Rather than you guys, again, go start a Hellenist church... no, you are part of our Church, so you are a part of us, so you will serve alongside of us. Rather than we are going to send a mission to you, we will link arms and work together with you. We have talked about this a few times over the last few years. I've, again, been here at this church for a long time, and I have seen a cultural change over the last few years because we have tried to be intentional about embracing other cultures... and not just saying "We want to minister to you, like missionaries, but we want to welcome you into our congregation and our family and serve with you." We have a long way to go, but I think we've come a long way. I think that's still an obstacle that a lot of churches deal with. "We want to minister to other cultures, and we're trying to figure out how to minister with other cultures so that we better reflect the Kingdom of God." That's what we see here in Acts 6. The culture wasn't an obstacle. We see that race was not an obstacle. There is one Greek, if you saw in there, a proselyte... Nicolaus from Antioch. He is a Greek who has become a believer in Jesus Christ, and so he is one of the ones chosen. We can see that church tradition, culture... none of these things are stopping these men from serving in the church.

What are the qualifiers? Are you in Christ, are you living for Christ, and do you think like Christ? *"Men full of the Holy Spirit..."* That means that you are in Christ... you have the Holy Spirit dwelling within you and so you have to be a believer to qualify as it is part of ministry. You have to be living for Christ... you have to be of good repute, meaning that others in the Church know this person is a person of faith. We see his life characterized by faith and devotion to the Lord. We see that they must be full of wisdom. So again, you can't be known for your wisdom if no one knows you. Right? We see that these people are integrated into the Body... that they're part of the everyday... that they're doing the "one anothers", practicing the "one anothers" with the rest of the Body. And the qualifications are pretty simple: Are you a believer... are you living it... and are you exercising wisdom as you live for the Lord? I want to clarify here a little bit because helping a church is sometimes attractive because of its therapeutic nature. Doing good can make us feel good about ourselves. That's a law-minded nature. It's the equation of what hangs in the balance... "My good works, my bad works... I've done a lot of bad so I need to make up for them with good." That's common... that's natural. But people seeking to escape their sin don't simply need a new lifestyle or a better company to keep, but they need new life and a spiritual family. So we want to make sure, as we say, "Hey, you should serve in the Church." We're not saying, "You'll feel better about yourself, you'll fill and

need, and everything will be good." We want to make sure that you understand that works done in faith by those who are in Christ means something different for eternity and for you. We don't want people just to get into our Church life and feel good about themselves and make them comfortable to make them forget all the bad things that they've done. If we do that, that's a very dangerous disservice that we are doing. So we proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ... about His incarnation, His crucifixion, His resurrection... because He is the only hope we have in this life or the next. So we proclaim Jesus as the Son of God who came, who lived a righteous life, a perfect life in perfect obedience to the Father, the life that we couldn't live, and when we trust in Him by faith, we are given new life, and now we can live the life that we couldn't live apart from Christ, and our good works actually please the Lord and have eternal significance, and it's not just a good work to feel good about ourselves or to make the world a better place. We want to be those who influence the Kingdom and do things by faith. So we stand on the Gospel of Jesus Christ and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and we see this as a qualifier here for those who are wanting to serve in the Church.

When you trust by faith in Christ, He saves and secures us for all eternity; but until He calls us home, we work. He has saved us for good works. We don't work to earn our salvation; we are working out our salvation, meaning we just love God by serving Him and ministering to others... because He has shown us such love in sending Jesus to save us. So before you dive into the work, I just want us to consider... are you in Christ and eligible, according to Acts 6:3? It means surrendering your life to Jesus as the number one qualification. *"Being of good repute..."* Again, people need to know you, to know your reputation, to know if you have a good reputation. You have to be observed in the Body of Christ. That's part of that Body life; being a member is knowing one another. If work is going to be entrusted to us, people need to know us. Following Jesus is not a hobby. It's personal, it's messy, it's inconvenient, and it's costly. I know that's not a great sales pitch, but that's what we see in Scripture. We see these men in Scripture proclaiming the Gospel, and they say that through many trials and tribulations will we inherit the Kingdom. Those who get it understand that we are not promised earthly victory, but we are promised victory over the earth. Does that make sense? ...That God is bigger... that Jesus has conquered those things that are of the world. We may experience the consequences of them while we are still here, but He has promised us an eternity that is far, far greater.

C) Maximizing ministry requires operating in giftedness.

The final key to releasing the work is operating in giftedness. The twelve here in Jerusalem, they knew that their primary ministry was preaching and teaching. This doesn't exempt them from serving in other ways, but it means that they needed to protect their primary ministry. If you think back all the way to the Old Testament, in Exodus, when Moses is leading the people through the wilderness and he starts to take on this role of pastor of all these people and they are all coming to him 24/7 with, "Hey... we have this problem and we have this problem and this problem. We have this issue. You're the leader; you need to figure this out." Jethro, his father-in-law, wisely steps in and says, *"What you are doing is not good."* That's not a paraphrase; that's what the ESV translation literally says. Jethro said, *"What you are doing is not good."* He says, "You and the people will wear yourselves out." He tells Moses to do the things that only Moses can do. Meaning, there are things that you as leader can only handle. Everything else, you need to give away to someone else. That will protect you and protect the ministry because we are not going to get very far doing this forever.

2. And Releasing Workers.

So we need to identify, as we are different parts in the Body, what our role is in the Church and how God has wired us for that. How has He uniquely prepared you to serve His Church and serve in His Church? And once we get that far into the process, we will see that growing pains don't just require releasing work but also releasing workers. This is a hard one for us because this is that stage where we get to the point where "Finally I got to know other people, and I went through the mess of sharing my life and being vulnerable and getting to know them and they know me. And I found where I can serve and where God wants to use me and how. I've been doing that and then this next level that we are going to in Acts 13 is, "Now that you're comfortable, I have something else for you to do over here." And that is a difficult next step.

But look in Acts 13, just the first few verses... *"Now there were in the church at Antioch, prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off."*

So in order for the Kingdom to advance, the Holy Spirit was calling Paul and Barnabas to go and do another work. Now these two men on this list... these two men out of this list are probably the most experienced of that group. So the Holy Spirit comes to them and says, "I need you to go somewhere else... for the Kingdom... for this lifelong mission that God has repurposed you for, I need you to leave what you are doing here and go do something else." Now, a worldly mindset would say, "Send one of those other guys. If they are the top dogs, they should get to decide, 'I don't want this task; I'm going to send so-and-so because I'm important... I'm comfortable and I am a leader, so I need to stay here. Send someone else to do that hard work and take the risks for us."

I had a "Willow" reference written in here, but I thought Pastor Steve would be the only one to recognize it... so I crossed it out. But if you want to hear the Willow reference, let me know after the service... I'll let you know. (Laughter) If you're really a fan of Willow, you probably already know what the reference was.

So the world mindset would say, "Let the others go. Send those. It's going to be risky, it's going to be difficult, it's going to be inconvenient, it's going to be uncomfortable... send the new guy." Right? ...Not the guys who are established and leading, but that's not what happens. And do you know why that's not what happens? ...Because they are listening to the Holy Spirit. They are not looking around the table and going, "Oh... I've got the lead chair so I'm calling the shots." They are together, seeking the will of God, listening to the Holy Spirit and then being faithful and obedient to follow the Holy Spirit. It's not an easy work. They go and yes people are converted... people want to hear the message because the Gospel is true, but they are scoffed, they are beaten... It's not an easy work, but they continue to do it. They continue to go. I am thankful that our elders have a Kingdom mindset here at HNW. I don't know if you've been here for the last few years, but we have had multiple church planters come into our church, preach from this stage and say, "Here is my vision for a church that I'm starting down the road." And then our leaders have gotten up and said, "If you want to go with them in this work, go do that." Now we don't have a list saying... except for so-and-so and so-and-so and so-and-so... except for our really good people. We need to keep them. No... if God is calling you to go and help these church plants, go and help these church plants. That's not common. You might think, "Oh yeah... we understand that HNW rolls like that." That's not how other churches do things. It's "He is going to recruit from somewhere else, and we are going to send him far

enough away that he is not going to steal from our people." But that's not the mindset that our leaders have. So I'm thankful for that... that it's a Kingdom mindset. And again, it's a mindset of faith because you never know who the Holy Spirit is going to go, "What about this one?" You might make people go... "Oh... we really need him. What about _____" But that's not how it goes. If the Holy Spirit calls, "Hey... Godspeed... we lay hands on." Which is again saying, "We want to say, we want to send you with our blessing... we want to send you in faith... we want to ask God to work through you and to go be part of this work." The senders and the goers have to be obedient to the Spirit. And you can't be obedient to the Spirit unless you are listening to the Spirit. I wonder for myself and we'll extend the question to you... "How many times have we missed out on an invitation from God to go and stretch our faith and experience something only God could have done because we weren't listening or didn't surrender to His leading if we heard Him call us? Do you have a Kingdom mindset? Is God asking you to step away from a group or a comfort that you have been in for a long time in order to start something new? Shouldn't our most-equipped go and lead so others can follow in their path? I pray that our faith and obedience would lead us into these exciting scenarios where we get to see God write an amazing testimony of what only He could do and what only He could have dreamed up. Not our plans but His.

So this morning, for us to consider... first of all, if you remember on the very front end... the church needs workers... Are you eligible for work? Do you remember the qualifications? Are you in Christ? Are you not just wanting to serve to feel better and make up for bad things that you have done, but are you in Christ? Are you living by faith? Do have the mind of Christ? And if so, if you can answer "Yes" to those things, then that next-level question is, "Are you being called to step out to advance the Kingdom in some other way... to leave a comfort behind and do something new because the Spirit wants to use you and make room for someone else to serve?" Those are our questions this morning.