

# Growing Pains

Acts 6:1-17

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Most businesses launch with a desire for rapid growth. The company “Kickstarter” is built on this very model. If a company or product is to be successful on the Kickstarter platform, it must have rapid customer growth and buy-in. However, there have been businesses on there that went viral and grew too big too fast without having the needed infrastructure to support the growth, which resulted in bankruptcy, broken financial agreements, and the product or business being quickly forgotten. Whether it is a business, a product, or a religious movement, rapid growth often results in growing pains and problems. If these issues aren’t handled wisely, they can go from bad to worse very quickly. Just because the early Church was a good and godly movement did not make it immune to these pains and problems. It was, after all, a rapidly multiplying family, and every family has its “growing pains.”

## **Growing Pains and Priorities (6:1-7)**

The first issue we see come up within this new family deals with food. Complaints about food have a long-standing tradition in the story of God’s people, and this new church family is no exception. This family mostly consists of Jewish believers at this point, but two different cultural groups are represented. The Hellenists and the Hebrews. It seems the Hellenists were Greek-speaking Jews that spoke little or no Aramaic, while the Hebrews would have spoken Aramaic and probably some Greek as well. It seems that in distributing food to the widows, the Hellenist widows were being overlooked, causing some grumbling and quarreling within the family. Upon hearing this, the Apostles directed the people to appoint seven qualified men in charge of the distribution. We are reminded of when Moses used the principle of delegation in Exodus 18:21-26, as did Jesus in Luke 10:1-12. This is the origin of the role of the “Deacon” within the church family. Making sure everyone had their material needs provided for, was such an important task that the role of the Deacon was later established as the only other official position alongside that of an Elder. Both positions have specific qualifications that need to be met, as found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. It is in this selection account that Luke introduces us to Stephen, who will play a big role in the section to come.

The Apostles did not delegate these responsibilities because they were too proud to do them but because they were needed for the more primary ministries of prayer and teaching. This has many implications for us as we think about the church today. Despite what some people think, the church isn’t a humanitarian organization. There are numerous ministries that the church can and should be a part of, but there is none greater than prayer and preaching the Word of God. It is through these ministries that the Kingdom of God is spread. It is important to recognize this. The Apostles didn’t further devote themselves to healings or speaking in tongues or doing more signs and wonders, but to prayer and teaching the Word of God. As a result, the church was growing numerically and spiritually.

This section ends by recording the expansion of the teaching of God's word and the multiplying number of disciples, as well as "a great many priests" who are also believing and joining this family. God's kingdom will not be stopped, and the issue of food which could have brought division and destruction, was so wisely handled that it only has served to increase the growth!

### **Stephen: A Christ-Like Man (6:8-15)**

It will be an incredible thing to meet and talk with Stephen someday. Little material is recorded about his life, but what has been recorded paints a powerful picture of this Christ-like man. First, he had to meet the Apostles' qualifications to be of "good repute, full of the spirit and wisdom." But beyond that, he is described as being full of grace and power, performing miracles, and having such a deep knowledge of God's Word, that opposing Jews from around the Mediterranean sea could not withstand his arguments in their disputes. His ministry was far more than handing out bread to widows, and as a result, there was now a target on his back for those who opposed this new movement.

As we continue, we see several parallels between the arrest and trials of Stephen and those of Jesus of Nazareth<sup>1</sup>:

- Their arguments were unbeatable
- They infuriated the Jews by speaking the truth
- They were arrested without cause and hauled in front of the Sanhedrin
- They were both lied about by false witnesses with similar lies being told
- They didn't seek to defend themselves
- The truth they proclaimed further enraged the Sanhedrin
- They were put to death in brutal ways
- They ask God to forgive those who killed them

Our section ends with Stephen enduring the falsehoods about him with an angelic countenance. Whether physically glowing or simply calm, peaceful, and fearless in the face of the Sanhedrin, all who were in the counsel could see "his face was like the face of an angel." And just like the Angels of God, Stephen had a powerful message to deliver to the Sanhedrin on God's behalf.

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### **Grace Family Needs, News & Notes**

**If you have a child in 6th-12th grade, head to the youth section of our website, [www.gccramona.com](http://www.gccramona.com), and keep up to date with all the summer events!**

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<sup>1</sup> See Matthew 26:57-63 for the similar account of Jesus' arrest and trial.