

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



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Deacons: Those Who Serve Well

Thriving congregations have several ingredients in common, but one element is often overlooked:

A corps of qualified deacons who work hard behind the scenes to make sure everything runs smoothly.

“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. 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. 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.’” (Ac. 6:2-4).



Like any organization experiencing rapid expansion, the church in Jerusalem faced problems. The Hellenistic widows in their number were somehow being overlooked in the daily serving of meals, and the oversight threatened the unity of the church. The apostles handled the benevolent funds (4:34-37) and apparently were responsible for distributing them. But the workload quickly outpaced the ability of the apostles to keep up—thus, the food service breakdown.

The solution to this problem was simple and practical. The apostles asked the congregation to choose seven men of proven character who could take over this work (“we will turn this responsibility over to them”, NIV). This solution offered two benefits: It furnished a team of dedicated workers who could ensure the job was done well, and it freed the apostles to devote more of their time and energy to preaching the word (v. 4).

Although these men are never called “deacons” in the text, the work they were given to do (“serve”) comes from the same root word. They were “deaconing.” And apparently they did a good job of it; there were no more complaints about missed meals, and the church remained harmonious and united.

The circumstances may be different, but the basic need for deacons still exists today. Every local church has a wide range of tasks that require attention. The elders are responsible for the high-level decisions relating to these tasks, but they cannot personally tend to all the details without something falling through the cracks. That’s why we need deacons.

The qualifications of deacons (1 Tim. 3:8-13) fit the nature of the work they perform. Deacons must be “reverent” (dignified, serious), for this is serious work they are involved in. They must not be “two-faced”—talking out of both sides of their mouth—because that suggests a weakness of character that Satan can exploit in difficult situations. Their work usually involves dealing with church funds, so obviously we need men in this role who are “not greedy for money.” Even their domestic life provides clues to their suitability for this work. If their home life is chaotic, they will probably make a mess of their church duties, too. Read the whole list in light of the work deacons may be called upon to perform. Not everyone can do that work; not everyone can be a deacon.

Strong deacons are a key ingredient to building strong churches. As we seek out from among ourselves capable men for this role, we should take care that we choose men who can commit to the work, with the expectation that they will do it well. There is much riding on the outcome of our choice.

—David King