

# Threats: Balance and Diaconal Ministry

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[ 0 : 00 ] If you've got a Bible, you can turn to the New Testament, to the book of Acts.

Acts chapter 6 is where we're going to be. Just the first seven verses of Acts chapter 6. We're back in our series and we listen to what Luke writes for us in the first seven verses of Acts chapter 6. In those days, when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, it would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.

We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word. This proposal pleased the whole group.

[ 1 : 27 ] They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and also Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Pominus, and Nicholas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

They presented these men to the apostles who prayed and laid their hands on them. So the Word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

This is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray. Let's ask for God's help this morning as we study. Father, won't you speak to us?

Won't you open up your Word to our hearts that we might see divine truth, that we might feast, have a meal that we can't actually get anywhere else?

The bread of life that is your Word. Fill us up. Change us by what we see. This is a supernatural, spiritual work, and so we need your Spirit to be at work, and we ask this for Christ's sake and His glory.

[ 2 : 35 ] Amen. So we're back in our series in the book of Acts, Trotting Along in Acts, and we're sort of in a new section now that starts a whole series of events, particularly around the subject of persecution.

Up until this point, this very fledgling church that we've been following the story of, these very first Christians forming their church together, facing all sorts of complicated things, they've seen incredible growth.

The numbers are big of the people coming to faith, but they've also seen significant challenges. So on the one hand, they've seen the sort of overt persecution that comes from the group known as the Sanhedrin, which is the Jewish ruling council, sort of the ruling elite of Jerusalem at the time.

They've threatened them and told them to stop preaching the gospel. On the other hand, there's been internal threats. Ananias and Sapphira and their dishonesty, their deceit, threatening to unravel the whole Christian movement from the inside through their dishonesty.

Now what actually happens is a third threat appears, and it's a very subtle threat. In fact, it's so subtle that as you read this passage, you might think, well, is that really actually a threat?

[ 3 : 49 ] And it's the threat of imbalance in ministry priorities. Let me say that again. It's the threat of imbalance in ministry priorities. And so perhaps the easiest way for me to help you understand what I mean by that is to ask this question.

And the question is, is the church supposed to preach the gospel or care for the poor? Think about that right now as you're sitting there. Is the church supposed to preach the gospel or care for the poor?

Now if in your head, as you're thinking about that, your answer is both, because you kind of intuit, well, I've seen both of those sorts of things in the Bible. If your answer is both, the minute you say

that, a whole range of other complicated questions all of a sudden pop up.

Are those two things equal priorities for the church, for example? Is one more important than the other? Who should be doing what?

Should everybody be preaching the gospel and caring for the poor? Should all Christians be doing that? Or should like, maybe should ministers and elders, should they preach the gospel? And in the ordinary Christians, they just do the stuff like caring for the poor.

[ 4 : 59 ] Should we do it as an institution, as a church? As in, should the church with its elders and its deacons, its elected officers, should they be responsible for both of those, or maybe just one of those two activities, and Christians more generically are responsible for the other one?

If you think about our faith itself, as Protestants, we boldly say salvation is by faith alone, not by works. So does that necessarily mean that good works, like caring for the poor, are then sort of, well, on the periphery of Christian activity?

While preaching and teaching the gospel is like in the bullseye, in the center. You see, the minute you start to sort of think deeply about these sorts of things, these questions come to the fore.

And you see just how complex it is to actually answer that question. You start to also realize, I think, that if you get the balance wrong, if you don't have your priorities shaped by the gospel, or the right priorities, or the right balances, whatever those are, you can quickly start to actually undermine the whole activity of the church.

because you can either end up with a church that is basically an NGO, but really has nothing to say about sin and forgiveness, about our eternal destinies, or you can end up with a church that's all about the spiritual, only if it talks about spiritual realities, but is pretty callous and cold and turns a blind eye to real material suffering that's going on around it and even in it.

[ 6 : 38 ] That's the threat that lay in front of this early church here. That's the threat of ministry imbalance that they had to deal with. And so in this passage, we're going to see how they solve it. And I'm going to tell you up front how they solve it.

The way that they solve it is by implementing what we might call a diaconal ministry, the ministry of the deacons. Most sort of Presbyterian reform theologians look at this passage, they look at this choosing of the seven, and they say, well, this is the foundational passage in the establishment of the formal office of deacon.

So Protestant churches, particularly Presbyterian churches, traditionally have two offices, elder and deacon, that are elected by the congregation. And so they would say, well, this is it. This is the start of the one of those.

This is the start of the deacons. Now you get a minority of reform scholars and writers who would be a little bit more circumspect, and they would say, well, you know what? The word deacon, the noun for deacon is actually not in the passage anywhere, nor is the word office.

But, but yeah, there are principles there that would help us think about what we should do when we have deacons in our church. And, and the office of deacon is definitely later on in the Bible.

[ 7 : 51 ] So it develops there, but maybe this is not really the, the official beginning of the deacons. So you get a minority of people who would sort of say that. I used to, in my cowardly way, kind of just be on the fence and take a mediating view between those two, who say that Acts is definitely, Acts is definitely about the start of the deacons.

And those who say, maybe there's some principles, but deacons developed later on in the new Testament. I was cowardly in between. I don't think that anymore. I've taken a stance now. I've been brave, stuck my neck out.

I've taken a position. I think I'm more on the traditional view now. And one of the things that actually moved me to the traditional view is ChatGPT. That is, I was actually using ChatGPT to look for the earliest bit of writing that we have outside of the old Testament.

in terms of commentary on Acts chapter 6. And the first person to comment on Acts chapter 6 after the end of the New Testament is a guy by the name of Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon in France in the second century.

And he writes a collection of works called Against Heresies. And in that he makes a couple of comments about Acts chapter 6. And that's the earliest writing we have after the Bible on Acts 6.

[ 9 : 09 ] And in his writing, and in almost all the other writings of that period and later, they all seem to see this as the beginning of the diaconate. So they're quite happy and comfortable to say, Stephen was a deacon, Philip was a deacon, and Nicholas was a deacon.

And so it seems that that was the dominant view amongst those earliest interpreters. And since they were so much closer to the actual event than we are today, I thought, well, I'm going to just go with them then.

It seems safer. And there's a lot of really good evidence. And I'll bring up some of that other evidence later as we go along. So here's the question. How does the deaconate address this particular threat that we talked about at the beginning?

Three ways. Here's our points this morning. Number one, they provide biblical balance. Number two, they provide mission integrity.

And number three, they provide glorious service. Biblical balance, mission integrity, glorious service. In case you just, before we go on, in case you're sitting there going, does Stephen prepare all of his sermons from ChatGPT?

[10:13] I don't. I just used it to find the reference. And then I actually went and read the actual reference. And you must always do that because ChatGPT lies. So read the original reference. Anyway, here's the first one. Biblical balance.

Now the balancing act here is working out how to balance the material care of people with the ongoing preaching of the word. So have a look at verse one.

In those days, when the number of the disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

So like we said, the early church is growing and it is growing rapidly through the preaching of the gospel by the apostles. Huge numbers of Jews in and around Jerusalem are coming to faith in Jesus.

So it's an incredible time. It's a wonderful time where the buildings are full, they're standing room only, but it creates significant logistical problems. How are we going to meet everybody's needs?

[11:14] The problem comes to the fore when a dispute then breaks out between two sets of these early Christians. At the time in Jerusalem, there are two types of Jews basically there, Hellenistic Jews and Hebraic Jews.

This is a sort of cultural and linguistic distinction. There were Jews who were predominantly Greek speaking, having probably come back to Jerusalem from being in the diaspora in the Eastern Mediterranean and now they were back living in Jerusalem, but it had a lot of Greek and Hellenistic culture in their background.

And then there were other Jews who actually despite the designation that you have there in that text, were probably not Hebrew speaking, but rather spoke Aramaic, which was the language that Jesus spoke and the disciples would have spoken at the time.

And they were much more culturally Hebrew. Their roots were in Jerusalem. Their ancestors hadn't gone away and then come back again. And so you've got these two groups, these two cultural groups.

And a dispute breaks out between their respective widows. Now you will notice if you're a keen reader of the New Testament, there's a lot of talk about widows in the New Testament in a way that maybe we don't talk about widows today.

[12:28] In fact, it looks almost like the church's dominant mercy and care ministry that they did was to widows and then sometimes also to orphans, but to widows.

There was like their dominant practical care ministry that they did. And that's really a commentary in the society of the time. To be a widow in the first century was to be in an especially vulnerable position socially.

The kind of employment opportunities that we have today for women in our society just were not there in the first century. And so to lose your spouse was like a one-way ticket to extreme poverty in the first century.

So right from the get-go, we see that the early churches engaged in this, this obvious issue, the societal issue. They're straight away from the very, very beginning of their founding involved in caring for these people in material need.

And it's very clear right from the beginning that there was a daily distribution of food to the widows. And really, I suspect that would have gone to anybody who was in need, but they were probably the dominant group receiving that.

[13:38] If you cast your mind back to earlier in our series, we looked at the snapshot of the early church that we get in Acts chapter 2. And right there in chapter 2, 45, it tells us that even straight

after Pentecost, when that first big wave of Christians came in, the believers were already pooling their wealth together at the apostles' feet to meet the needs of the vulnerable.

Now what happens is here, a dispute breaks out in Acts 6. The Hellenistic Jews complain that their widows are getting overlooked in favor of the Hebraic widows in that daily distribution.

So here's what the apostles do. Remember, at this point, they've just been getting all the money and distributing it themselves from everybody. Here's what they do now. Verse 2. So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, So they make an assessment here.

And they essentially say, preaching of the word is critical. It's absolutely critical. We cannot have this critical ministry waylaid by these material concerns.

We can't neglect the ministry of the word and of prayer. But, that doesn't mean they think that the material concerns of the people are unimportant or should be neglected.

[15:18] So they go a step further. And they say, You church, here's what we want you to do. We want you to set aside seven godly people of high caliber to take responsibility for these material concerns.

Now I want you to see the genius of what they're doing and what's going on here. They stop the church basically from falling into the trap of putting spiritual needs against material needs.

And they do that by a division of labor. They very, very clearly, and you can't get away from this, but they very, very clearly establish the primacy of the preaching of the word.

That is, the church exists to preach the gospel and make disciples. You want to know why we exist as a community, as a church? That is the answer to why we exist.

To preach the gospel and make disciples. The church is to proclaim the gospel. That's what we're about. See what they say there in verse 2. It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.

[16:23] There's a clear primacy given to the preaching of the word here in the passage. And that should not be a surprise to you as we've kind of walked through the book of Acts. Remember the commission that gets given to them all the way back at the very beginning in chapter 1.

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And then how do we see those very apostles then bearing witness?

They preach the gospel. They preach the gospel at Pentecost. They preach the gospel in the temple. They preach the gospel in front of the Sanhedrin. They preach the gospel over and over and over again they preach the gospel.

So there's a clear primacy on the preaching of the word. The very nature of the gospel demands this if you think about it.

The gospel is good news. It's what it is. It's good news about what God has done in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now generic good deeds as good as they are generic good deeds don't in and of themselves communicate those fundamental truths.

[17:36] You still have to actually speak them. You have to say them. You have to teach them. You have to preach them. Think about it this way. I, as probably many of you did when I was in both in actually even before primary school junior primary in Durban we had junior primary senior primary then high school where I grew up but we had ties from grade one class one.

We had ties I think at the very very beginning they might have had an elastic but then after a while you had to learn to tie a tie. I can really to this day still only just tie the one knot that I was taught to do for my school tie.

I've never been able to do any of the other kind of fancy knots but I was looking up and apparently the most complicated knot because it takes 15 steps is the Eldridge knot. I don't know if any of you can tie an Eldridge knot.

It's considered the most complicated tie knot to tie. Now if I was going to this morning teach you how to tie an Eldridge knot the best way for me to do that would be to take a tie a loose tie put it around my neck and then have you all put loose ties around your neck and then sort of step by step demonstrate each move until you finally have the tie tied.

It would be near impossible for me to teach you how to tie an Eldridge knot without that physical demonstration. So if I for example if I put my hands behind my back and I just used words you guys all have the ties around your neck and I just used words I doubt I could get a single one of you to tie that knot the way it's supposed to be tied unless you knew how to tie it already.

[ 19 : 25 ] Some things are just better suited to being conveyed by demonstration rather than by words. I've actually done this exercise in a seminar once and no one got anywhere near the knot that I was trying to get them to tie.

Now the converse of this is true as well. Some things are near impossible to convey using only demonstration and not words. So for example if I go into an impoverished community driven by deep compassion driven by Christian conviction and I go in there and I go and help this sickly elderly person and I get him cleaned up and I get him all healthy and I build him a house and I supply him with food and I set him up with a social grant and I do a whole lot of wonderful things for him driven purely by Christian conviction if I do all of that but I don't say a single word about Christ no onlooker who's in that community who's watching me do all of that stuff all of that compassion all of that charity no onlooker is going to watch all of that for a couple of weeks and then go oh you know what you know what all of that tells me that tells me that God sent his only son

Jesus Christ into the world to live the perfect life that we who are trapped in sin are unable to live to die the death that we deserve to die because of our sin that on the third day he rose again and that we can have all our sins forgiven we can be reconciled back to our created God if we would repent of our sin and place our faith in him nobody's going to get that just by watching me nobody's going to get that without me speaking the words of the gospel to them and so the apostles here underline the preaching of the word nobody is going to get reconciled back to God if they don't preach nobody's going to know about forgiveness nobody's going to know about life eternal if we don't preach the church dies without the primacy of the preaching of the gospel tragically today there are dead churches in our city because they have lost the primacy of the preaching of the gospel but there's something else there is something else that is also so critical to the well-being of the church that the apostles feel the need to make a division of labor to address it and not just let it slip away out of the picture and that is the material care for the poor and so by right there and then at this critical juncture making this division of labor what they are communicating is this they are saying don't for a second think that caring for material need is some sort of minor afterthought it's a critical part of who we are and what we do as Christians in fact that's why these deacons are to be people full of the spirit and wisdom did you see that

Paul will later in the book of 1 Timothy give a list of character requirements for deacons in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and it's really not that different from the character requirements for elders and ministers so deacons are supposed to be competent godly people the work of deaconing if I can make that word up is not sort of it's not second class ministry and this division of labor sets that up see think about it this way if caring for the material needs of the people was a minor afterthought then the competency and the character of the deacons wouldn't really matter would be inconsequential one of the reasons many people think this is actually the formal establishment of the office of deacon is because of the laying on of hands in verse 6 you would have noticed that feature if you read the Old Testament leadership transitions in the Old Testament were often accompanied by this laying on of hands we also actually know from the first century that if you were to be admitted to the Sanhedrin to the ruling council you had to go through a very similar sort of laying on of hands ritual and so that's made a lot of commentators say hang on this is much more formal what's going on here this is really an ordination or a commissioning of some sorts it's a formal designation of an office it's not just the guys going hey you seven you look healthy and strong why don't you just look after those people and so that whole ordination process then lends significant weight to the importance of caring for the material poor we don't ordain people to a whole host of other things that we know we're supposed to be doing as Christians and yet the Bible wants to ordain people to that particular role the apostles want to be deeply deeply committed to the primacy of the preached word on the one hand but they don't want to do that in such a way that it will give even a hint that material care is unimportant and so that's the solution the division of labor the creation of the diaconal ministry that's how they get the balance up front the ministry balance up front the biblical balance now here's the second thing that they do they provide mission integrity so that's the second thing we get from the establishment of the early diaconate is mission integrity now what do I mean by that exactly well when the diaconal work is functioning well the overall mission of the church to preach the gospel and to make disciples is massively enhanced verse 5 they put the proposal to the church and it says this proposal pleased the whole group they chose

Stephen a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit also Philip Prochorus Nicanor Timon Parmenas and Nicholas from Antioch a convert to Judaism and they presented these men to the apostles who

prayed and laid their hands on them so they chose seven men to carry out this deaconing work they commissioned them they lay hands on them and then there's Luke's final comment in verse 7 so the word of God spread the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith so Luke says we did this and the church grew the church grew in fact it grew rapidly in fact even a category of people that we would have thought were really hard to see come to the faith the priests they even started coming to the faith after this he puts that detail there as if to say listen when you get this balance right of word ministry and caring for material needs when you get that division of labor right it results in the overall flourishing of the mission of the church now occasionally you'll hear this sort of rhetoric in churches we've just got to preach the gospel this material care stuff yes we probably have to do it at some level because Jesus tells us to care for the poor but it's really really sort of way way way down the priority list we've got to preach the gospel if we want to see the church grow friends I think the bible by having a formal office of deacon says that that sort of rhetoric is misguided it's not biblical caring for the material needs of our people is critically connected to our mission to make disciples so you want to grow the church yes preach the gospel as of the utmost importance but you also make sure that you give yourself to the needy and the vulnerable in your ranks because without that here's what you lack you lack integrity and if you think about it it makes complete sense you're trying to attract people to the gospel of Jesus Christ you're going to have a hard time doing that without some sort of diaconal ministry in your church because people are going to come in skeptics are going to come into your midst so people that you're trying to say hey I really want to share

[ 27 : 52 ] Jesus about you and they're like my jury's out on Jesus and everything that you say about Jesus but they're going to come in and then they're going to watch your church at work and they're going to hear the things that you say up front and the things that you sing about the things that you preach all the word stuff but they're going to eventually go if you've got no diaconal ministry they're going to eventually go you proclaim this Jesus who brings life but you don't bring life to your most vulnerable members never mind the world out there you don't even bring life to your most vulnerable members here inside these four walls how can I possibly then trust in this Jesus who you say brings life and so friends a vibrant diaconal ministry is absolutely critical to the growth and the health of the mission of the church it can't be a secondary afterthought now one thing to add here and this is really important is that having a vibrant diaconal ministry doesn't mean that the church outsources all of its care to a select few who do all the work like you just give your money to the once a month benevolence fund that we take which is the diaconal fund and then well the deacons go do all the work so you don't have to think about it anymore that's not how it works the elected deacons certainly take responsibility for it but everybody is under the obligation to get involved so here's

Galatians chapter 6 verse 10 the apostle Paul says therefore as we have opportunity let us do good to all people especially to those who belong to the family of believers that verse is not written just to deacons that verse is written to all of us if anything the office of the deacon is basically there to spur the rest of us on to love and care for those in material need around us that's why I love what they write in the Presbyterian church in America the PCA they have a big document called the book of church order that helps churches understand how they're supposed to govern themselves and in their chapter on deacons they say this they say it is the duty of the deacons to minister to those who are in need to the sick to the friendless and to any who may be in distress it is their duty also to develop the grace of liberality in the members of the church it's really important that last line we don't just give money and then get them to do the first part but there's the last line there deacons develop the grace of liberality in the members of the church liberality is the quality of giving or spending freely and that's not just with your money that's with your time and with your energy as well so God has set up the office of deacon in the church to move all of us all of us ordinary members who do all sorts of other things to move us to minister to those who are in need to those who are sick to those who are friendless to anyone who may be in distress and thereby through us all doing that advance and undergird the integrity of the mission of the church so when we open our mouths and when we preach that in Jesus

Christ alone true life can be found there's got to be something of a foretaste of that in our communal life together that diaconal ministry active in our community that's mission integrity now thirdly the establishment of a diaconate brings glorious service the exact task of these early deacons in act 6 is described as waiting on tables in verse 2 so those of you who ever had to work at a restaurant

are probably going I never ever want to be a deacon it's literally serving at tables there and the original greek word for serving there is a word diakoneo now the noun deacon that's in other parts of the bible is a word diakonos literally just means servant it can mean servant in certain contexts it can mean formal deacon in other contexts and it seems from act 6 that the direct and the primary object of this service so you say they're serving what are they serving what is the primary object of this service it seems that the primary object of this service is those within the church who are in material need ed clowny who's a presbyterian minister in the previous century wrote a really important book on the doctrine of the church and in that book he does a sort of a study on this word diakoneo and looks at the ways it occurs in the new testament and basically concludes that most often it's associated with serving the basic needs of people in distress people who are vulnerable he'd even point out that if you go to

Romans chapter 12 in the gift lists in Romans 12 there are said to be those who actually have a special gift of showing mercy and serving in this way so there's definition to this service that the deacons provide and it centers on meeting material needs especially among the most vulnerable I said primary focus of service because I don't think it's the only focus of their service there is a practical component to this and that is that the waiting of tables would have required the deacons to handle money handle resources and so what we tend to see in church history as people have thought about the office of deacon in different churches is that deacons are often tasked with stewarding the church's finances and properties as well it's what we do here as well we divide our deacons up between those two things I think that's completely in keeping with the broader picture that the new testament has of deacons but I really really do think and I want to stress this I do think we need to keep the mercy aspect the serving the needy aspect central to our conception of deacons because I think that's what it is in the bible in some churches deacons tend to do all the sort of practical work in the church and the care of the material needs of the vulnerable slip off the table because buildings have got to be repaired the grass has got to be cut the numbers need to be balanced and I think to lose that central focus on the poor on the vulnerable is to lose the central focus of the work of the deacon serving the congregation and mercy ministry so the role of the deacon is one of service it's a glorious service see here's the reality the reality is that in a church where diaconal work is done well you will often never see a large amount of that work you'll never see the hours of dedication put in by the deacons and those assisting them caring for people who have just had their lives fall to pieces through illness through disaster through bereavement through the general harshness of life in this world you'll never see the cost that's endured by those who are serving you'll never see the emotional strain of confronting what really seems like relentless poverty here in our country you'll never see the spiritual and psychological burden of being regularly confronted by human brokenness and that's all because the work of the deacon is pretty discreet necessarily so in order to uphold the dignity of those that we're serving but it is in those moments though those unseen moments those moments of unnoticed service that true glory is found and so in a way the office of the deacon not only motivates and encourages all of us into the glory of service but it actually points us forward it points us forward to true glory and you say well how does it do that well I want you to listen to the words of

Jesus in Mark chapter 10 as he calls his disciples aside and he teaches them about true greatness about true glory this is what he says to them Jesus called them together and he said you know that those who are regarded as rulers of the gentiles lord it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them not so with you instead whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all for even the son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many you know what Jesus is essentially saying in that last line if you'll allow me to make up some English words here he's literally saying the son of man came not to be deaconed but to deke and his deking you know what form his deking took his deking took the form of him giving his life to ransom us from the sin from the death from the brokenness that enslaves us and that's true greatness he says that's true glory the one who deserves by virtue of who he is the one who deserves to be served by all the glorious son of God he comes and he serves us the cost of his life and so

[ 37 : 53 ] Christ can then turn to his disciples and he can say that if they really want to be great if they really want to know what greatness is if they really want to know what glory is if they want to taste glory if they want to experience glory then follow that path follow the path of costly service that leads them in the way of the savior who gives his life to serve others friends the work of the diaconate is a in this life before Jesus comes again it is a pushing back of the darkness that's what

it is it's defiance open defiance against all that is wrong with this world it's to use tangible acts of love and care and mercy to proclaim the one who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many it's a critical ministry pray for your deacons assist your deacons be encouraged and motivated by your deacons to enter into this ministry as we follow our sacrificial lord let's pray together our father and our king we thank you for the incredible service we have been recipients of service that our lord jesus christ rendered to us as he gave his life on the cross father may we be broken by what we see there may we be changed and transformed by what we see there as we know we have been recipients of that love and that mercy and may it transform us into those who would serve formally in the church through the office of the deacon but informally through each person being motivated to serve those around us who are in need those around us who are sick those around us who are in distress those around us who are hurting father

I pray that we would have mission integrity here in this church when people come into this church they wouldn't hear us proclaim Jesus who brings life they would also experience it help us in this Lord it's hard it's hard hard work because there's a lot of brokenness it's messy work it it exacts a cost from us but Lord it is the work of glory because it is the work of your son grow us as a church in this area Lord we pray and then Lord I pray for any person who's sitting here this morning who who maybe thinks I'm not sure I've ever been a recipient of that service that serving love of Jesus Christ I pray that they would see the wonder of what Christ has done in serving us at the cross and that they would repent and come to faith in him grant them that blessing this morning we pray and we ask this all for

Christ's sake and his glory amen