

WHITFIELD PARISH
St James' Church † St Luke's Church

LIFE Group Notes w/b Sunday 5 October 2008

Danger : Church at work! – Stephen, dying to live
Acts 6.1-15

(This week's study is in two parts. If you don't get onto the second part, don't worry about it!)

Part 1: Growing Pains

Read Acts 6.1-7

1. As you read this passage, what stands out to you? Is there anything you don't understand about it?

The growth of the Jerusalem church recorded so far in Acts was phenomenal. Acts 6 gives us the first glimpse of some of the pressures this growth placed on the church and its leadership. Inevitably, it was the mundane, practical matters that created the problems.

2. We are a church that has grown in recent years. What pressures has this growth placed on our church and leaders?

While many churches today run a wide variety of caring programmes, few have to take on a 'daily distribution of food' similar to the Jerusalem church! (However, this does occur in many poorer countries today.) The response of the apostles is interesting.

3. How do the apostles solve this logistical problem? Does this response indicate that they consider this kind of pastoral ministry to be less important than their rôle of preaching and prayer?
4. These days, we expect our leaders to be able to do everything: from prayer and preaching, through management and personal care. In a growing church, is there a place for the kind of specialisation of ministries and rôles we see in Acts 6?

In v3-4, the apostles set the parameters for the kind of people they are looking for, yet they give the responsibility of choosing the right people to the church community.

5. We tend to rely on church leaders to identify potential new leaders within the church. How could we be better at encouraging each other into taking responsibility and leadership within the church?
6. The result of this internal restructuring was further growth. As we look to grow as a church in the future, what kind of internal restructuring might be necessary for us? At an appropriate moment, pray for the leaders and congregations in our parish as they look to the future.

Part 2: Stephen's Story

Read Acts 6.8-15

The persecution that has been bubbling under in Acts 4-5 bursts onto the surface here. Stephen, a young leader in the church, becomes the focal point in what will prove to be a turning point in the church's story.

7. Where are you most on the cutting edge of the Kingdom? What would it mean for you to see God's power at work there?

As we shall see, Stephen doesn't respond to the false accusations against him (7.1ff.). Instead, he treats every example of opposition as an opportunity to witness to Jesus. His own fate is not important to him, only that others hear about Jesus.

8. Do you think you would be prepared to live with false accusations made against you? What does your reputation mean to you?
9. Stephen responds to his accusers with 'the wisdom the Spirit gave him'. Where do you most need that wisdom? As you finish this week's study, pray for each other that God would give you this wisdom (James 1.5).