# UNSTOPPABLE SERVICE

**Acts 6:1-7**

**INTRODUCTION**

As we continue along in the book of Acts today, we come to chapter 6. So far in the first 5 chapters a lot has happened! The Spirit came to fill the believers, Peter boldly proclaimed the gospel, the church was birthed, miracles were performed, lives were changed, prison bars were opened, and the church continued to multiply! There’s no doubt that something significant and seemingly unstoppable was on the move! The resounding story that will be remembered is the success of the church through the power of the Holy Spirit!

But what can’t be lost in the midst of the success is the attempt of setbacks. All great triumphs are accompanied by trying times. I’m sure you all can relate to this. I would bet there was a time in your life when you were going after something big but were at the same time faced by an overwhelming obstacle. It likely seemed easier to give up and try something new, but you decided to push through and find your way out of the struggle. You persevered because you knew that no great course is traversed without bumps in the road. In fact, as someone once said, “If you find a path with no obstacles, it probably doesn’t lead anywhere.”

This is because we come to accept that obstacles are essential ingredients in the process. Adversity is not something added to the bridge towards accomplishment. It is itself the necessary bridge to accomplishment! Or for the sake of our series, learning to break through the “stops” is necessary to becoming unstoppable.

Here are a few examples of the strugglesome stops faced by the church so far in the book of Acts. And what we see is that they often abruptly arrive on the scene after a major success.

S truggles so far in Acts

1. A cts 5:1, right after we learn of the great grace that has been on the

apostles and the disciples and how they all things in common, we are introduced to Ananias and Sapphira: *“BUT a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”*

1. A cts 5:17, right after we learn of the many signs and wonders being

done through the apostles and how all are being healed, we learn the apostles are arrested: *“BUT the high priest rose up, and all who were with him, and filled with jealousy, they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison.”*

***We see that with each momentous step forward of blessing, there are noted obstacles that attempt to halt and derail the church.*** As we come into Acts 6 today, we learn from the last verse of chapter 5 that the disciples every day in the temple and from house to house did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus. What do you think is about to happen in chapter 6? That’s right, a struggle.

***But what’s unique to this struggle is twofold: 1) It’s subtle and 2) It’s internal.*** This is not a frontline, advancing the lines type of issue. It’s not even an outside issue, but rather an in-house issue. Let’s read v.1: *“Now in these days, when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.”* The issue here is an internal complaint, a complaint brought up by the Hellenists, or the Greek-speaking Jewish converts. Their issue is that their widows were being neglected in the daily food distribution.

We know that up to this point the church has worked very hard to supply the needs of all the believers. We read in Acts 2:45 that *“They were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all as any had need.”* And in Acts 4:34 it says, *“There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold to the apostles.”*

The church has expressed great compassion for the needs of those in their ranks….but the church continues to grow! ***What the church is experiencing now is growing pains!*** Do you remember having those as a kid? I occasionally hear from Hudson or Elliot about a pain in their legs they just can’t shake. I tell them it’s growing pains, and it simply means that while their legs keep growing, their body can’t keep up with the growth, so it causes pain! This is what is happening here: The body of Christ keeps growing, but it’s hard to keep up with the changes, so much so, that it actually causes pain for some who are missed or neglected.

This is an important internal issue for the church to move past. ***If they can’t get past this social struggle, it will greatly compromise their evangelistic mission!*** Isn’t this the case for so many churches: They become crippled on the inside and it sidelines them from missions outside. We definitely don’t want this to be the issue at Oakwood. While we are moving outward, we cannot neglect the in-house issues. We are, after all, a family.

The reality is that as the church grows, the number of needs within the church grows as well. As with all big families, there’s a lot of moving parts. To supply for the growing needs, ***more people need to serve.*** More gaps need to be filled. And they need to be faithfully filled, willingly filled, cheerfully filled, lovingly filled, for the glory of God! Every church has various needs that must be met. The same is true at Oakwood. ***In order for people in our church and through our church to be properly cared for, people must step up to the plate and serve.*** The obstacle that faced the church both then and today is that of service, in terms of both quantity and quality.

***Considering the many needs of the church, God expects all believers to serve.*** That’s the quantity element, but there’s also the quality element: How should they serve? Everything about the answer to this question affects how people are blessed or not blessed in and through our church. As we already said, it affects everything about how people are blessed beyond these doors! We don’t want our service to be deemed stoppable.

We want to push through hindrances and have our service in the Spirit to be declared unstoppable! ***So in these seven verses we’ll uncover 3 ways we should serve the church in order to make a real difference.*** These three ways are:

* 1. **We should all serve faithfully. (v.1-2)**
	2. **We should all serve intentionally (v.3-4)**
	3. **We should all serve with a godly character. (v.5-6)**

**BODY**

***So first, we should all serve f aithfully.*** As we already saw, the church was growing in size and influence, which increased the number of administrative assignments. More people were needed to serve! There quickly became more needs than servers. This naturally increased the gaps in the flow of ministry since clearly not everyone was filling a role to serve. As a result, the Hellenists felt short-changed in the daily food distribution. People were actually left hungry as they went to sleep at night!

***\*The key point here is that gaps in the flow of ministry affect the fruitfulness of the ministry.*** When people don’t serve, needs are not met and lives go unchanged. We all here have been positively affected by the service of others. Think back to the ways your life has become fruitful because someone chose to give of their time or resources to bless you.

Imagine if that person didn’t sacrifice to meet your need. How would your life be different today?

Now it’s true that not everyone is in a season in which they can faithfully fill a role in a church - There are moms with young kids, seasons of work that are unnaturally busy, others have medical setbacks, and so on. \****But the main theological reason why more people don’t serve and do so faithfully is because we all are predisposed to first serve ourselves.***

Our natural inclination is not outward but inward. We don’t say it, but many of us live our lives according to this principle: ***Once I have been taken care of, then I can care for others.***

* This affects the amount of money we give. Once all bills are paid, my retirement is in order, my house has just the things I want in it, and I’ve set aside money for my next vacation, ***then I will give to the needs of others.***
* This affects the time we serve. Once all my family needs are met, I’ve finished all my home projects, and fulfilled my need for entertainment and rest, ***then I will go serve others in the time that remains.*** Sadly, rarely ever is there any time left!

Jesus taught us the foolishness of the person whose life revolves around themselves. He said in Matthew 16:24, *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”* This paradoxical statement makes no sense to a worldly person. How could I lose my life by trying to save it? How do I save my life by losing it?

This only makes sense when someone comes to understand and believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. ***You see, there is a life Jesus offers that is far superior to the life offered by worldly pursuits.*** It’s a life synonymous with the living water Jesus offered the woman at the well in John 4. She had lived her life chasing after fulfillment through various men, only to be left alone and empty. Yet Jesus said He had water she did not know about, living water that would fill her eternally.

***When we are filled with this eternal life, we can live self-sacrificially for others!*** We can, in fact, die to ourselves BECAUSE Jesus promises to daily resurrect us with spiritual life! This promise is what allowed the Apostle Paul to say in 1 Corinthians 15, *“I die everyday!”* It was Paul who also clarified how that was possible in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: “*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”* This

filling is not a feeling we must wait to experience. Jesus says that if we are in Him, He gives the grace and strength to fulfill what He calls us to do.

John Piper calls this ***“Faith in future grace.”*** You put your faith in what God promises to give you. However, we often miss out on the experience of this inner grace because we don’t first step out to serve. We instead assume we must first feel filled. But the truth is that we must first obey!

## \*When you OBEY, you OPEN yourself to God’s special blessing.

How is it that you can faithfully serve others, even when you personally feel weak and uninterested? Because Jesus promises you both energy to fulfill that service and a better experience of true life in Him.

The church needs everyone to serve in order to carry out its mission. Your willingness to faithfully serve matters to the church! If you don’t fill your role faithfully, even if it feels insignificant, others will be affected. We wouldn’t be able to bless families and their little ones with childcare and kid’s ministry if we didn't have faithful workers to fill that gap. We wouldn’t be able to express the affections of our hearts to God in worship if the Worship Team didn’t faithfully prepare to lead us in song. The last thing we want is for any complaints to arise in our church because people aren’t being cared for as they should. We confess this does occasionally surface. There are occasional legitimate complaints that need to be addressed. But this should be the exception, not the norm. ***Lives are always touched by the service we render to the church. Lives are changed when we change our schedules and priorities to fill a gap.***

## But more than us all serving faithfully, we should all serve

***i ntentionally.*** What do I mean by this? Let’s look at our passage. In v. 2 it says, *“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.’”* Because there was a gap in service and not everyone was filling their role, the Apostles were feeling pressure to give up their main assignment of preaching.

Situations similar to this periodically happen at our jobs. When someone is sick, goes on vacation, or quits, someone has to fill their assignment. That lucky person may just be you! You are now required to not just maintain your regular role but also fill someone else’s. What results is poor quality on both ends! The apostles were feeling this pressure here. They knew they couldn’t do both well. What they did know is that God had called them to preach. It’s how they were gifted and empowered by the Spirit.

\****Therefore, they should serve intentionally in the sweet spot of their spiritual gifting.*** They shouldn’t feel reluctant or hesitant to serve according to their strengths!

God hasn’t called us to randomly fill a roll. He didn’t say we could all do every job equally the same. ***Instead, He’s uniquely gifted each of us to fulfill certain roles with greater ability and fruitfulness!*** Romans 12:6 says, *“****6*** *Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;* ***7*** *if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching;* ***8*** *the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”* These verses make one thing clear: ***You should serve according to the grace gift God has given you!***

***\*When we fill a role that doesn’t fit our gifting, it limits the fruitfulness of our efforts and the joy we have in doing it.*** Listen, you don’t want me determining the aesthetics of our church building. I don’t have the slightest clue as to how something should look. My visual creativity is microscopic. The big question for me is, “Is it functional? Does it work?” When Emma was decorating the Worship Center for Christmas, she tried to invite me into the decision-making. With a puzzled face, I looked over to her, and said, “Do you remember who you’re married to?” I will do whatever you say!”

As you can see, it’s beneficial for us to each know how the Spirit has uniquely gifted us for ministry. Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? The Bible says that you have at least one!

(Show Spiritual Gifts slide) → There are many great spiritual gifts surveys online. What’s usually true is that your spiritual gifts align with your interests and passions. This is because we find greater joy in the things we do well. Think back to a particular project, position, or assignment in which it felt like God’s strength and grace was naturally flowing through you. Rather than feeling like a stream filled with rocks and impediments, you felt like a

free-flowing stream of God’s grace to others. These experiences bring us

joy because we sensed God’s hand upon us.

If you can’t recall a time when God clearly used you to accomplish something that also brought you joy, that’s okay! You have an assignment to discover your unique spiritual gifting. I would most recommend a

***S.H.A.P.E assessment***. It’s a free online test to help you understand how your spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality, and experiences. We are all complex beings and there’s no quick simple box to put us into.

And let’s clarify, too, that every part is important! There is not a single assignment or gifting that is better or more essential than another. What’s most important is that we are each fulfilling our special roles. Paul says in 1

C orinthians 12:21, *“21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of*

*you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable...But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”*

*\*****Our unity in diversity is what makes us special and powerful!*** Even God Himself is not uniform, but rather 3 unique persons of the Trinity! His love for diversity extends into the makeup of the church. We are all different and possess different strengths and weaknesses. Rather than belittling these differences, we can celebrate them and encourage them!

I want you to catch the vision of how important this is to the joy and fruitfulness of our church. We can go either of two directions. One direction

can be symbolized by a car that’s way past due for an oil change. The engine for the time being still works, but it’s not pleasant and not healthy for the car. You can hear the metal-on-metal sound of the engine struggling to keep going. It’s not a situation built for sustainability. The same is true in a church in which people don’t give sincere thought to their spiritual gifts and just fill a role because there’s a need. This is okay for a season, but it’s not sustainable and it’s not healthy. Eventually, the engine will give out. Pain will be felt and the ministry of the church will be affected.

What we much more prefer is that of a car well-lubricated. Things internally run as they should. The car can then run for strength and endurance.

Rather than the unpleasant sound of scraping metal, there is a seamless and smooth flow of all the parts. Similarly, a church of people serving according to their spiritual gifts removes most internal issues and allows the movement of the church to be smooth, strong, and sustainable. When we serve intentionally in the sweet spot of our spiritual giftedness, we enable God to more easily fulfill His unstoppable mission through us.

## But even more important than serving faithfully and serving intentionally in our giftings, we must be a people who serve with a

***g odly character.*** I find it intriguing in our text in v.3 that the characteristics

mentioned of these new leaders are not purely their spiritual gifts and talents. Instead, we primarily get a listing of their godliness! It says, *“Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit, and of wisdom.”* Later in v.5 they highlight Steven, not for his heart of service or compassion, his administrative gifts, or his leadership gifts, but he’s a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit!

Likewise is done with the list of qualities needed of deacons (who many believe are being set apart in our passage here) in 1 Timothy 3:8: *“8 Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.”*

This clearly shows us what God’s highest priority is for us: Our own godliness. Our own holiness. Our own Christlikeness. Yes, when we operate in our spiritual gifts, we will likely produce more fruit, but here’s the key: *\*****The fruitfulness of our spiritual gifts is determined most by the faithfulness of our spiritual walk.*** More than any spiritual gift, the greatest gift you can give someone is your own godliness. What do I most mean by this? ***In its essence, the greatest gift you can give someone is not you, but God through you!*** Your spouse doesn’t most need you; your spouse most needs God through you! Your friends don’t most need you; they need God through you! And your church doesn’t most need you; we need God through you! What more are spiritual gifts than quicker, more efficient pathways by which we see God through you!

Remember the words of Jesus in J ohn 15:5: *“5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”* You can do no spiritual good if you are not intimately connected to Jesus! Christian author Brennan Manning is well-known for this quote on this matter: *“The Word we study has to be the Word we pray. My personal experience of the relentless tenderness of God came not from exegetes, theologians, and spiritual writers, but from sitting still in the presence of the living Word and beseeching Him to help me understand with my head and heart His written Word. Sheer scholarship alone cannot reveal to us the gospel of grace. We must never allow the authority of books, institutions, or leaders to replace the authority of*

## \*knowing\* Jesus Christ personally and directly. When the religious views of others interpose between us and the primary experience of Jesus as the Christ, we become unconvicted and unpersuasive travel agents handing out brochures to places we have never visited.”

This is what results when God is not active in us: We become unpersuasive travel agents handing out brochures to places we’ve never visited. What’s much more compelling in the Christian life is the one who is living it, breathing it, and overflowing with it to the lives of others! People cannot get to Christ if you are the obstacle in the way.

***Therefore, \*we must have a greater focus on growing our godliness than on exercising our giftedness.*** What are you doing to abide in Christ? Are you feeding on Him in His Word? Are you getting alone with Him? I remember a mentor of mine asking me a question while in seminary. He said, ***“It’s great that you want to publicly make God known, but can you be alone with God?”*** He went on to say, ***“If you truly want to make an impact out there, you must be most concerned about what happens here (at home).”***

I encourage you to establish disciplines of godliness that with time become habits of godliness. I know we all go through seasons in which we are great at being alone with God in prayer and His Word, but then we get out of the habit. It’s important to remember that habits are synonymous with culture.

Just as a healthy culture is the byproduct of healthy well-established systems, so habits are byproducts of well-established disciplines. \****You will never normally be alone with God until you’ve gone through the abnormal work of working Him into your daily schedule.***

And who in your life is regularly asking you about your alone time God? If you don’t have that person, get one! You will always graciously bail yourself out with excuses for why you haven’t been faithful in this, but a good friend will hopefully with love knock you over with good sense as to what your priorities should always be!

When our own godliness becomes our greatest goal, our service to others will produce the same in them: godliness. What higher desire could we have for another than their own love for God.

# CONCLUSION

## So we’ve seen in our passage today that it’s vitally important that all God’s people serve. But more than the quantity of our service, we care about the quality of our service. We should all serve faithfully. We should all serve intentionally. And we should all serve with a godly character.

We began by talking about adversity. We said that adversity is itself the necessary bridge to accomplishment. This side of heaven there is no way to avoid adversity. I think it’s encouraging that we see so much of it in the book of Acts. ***It reminds us that obstacles are not a sign that we’ve failed but a sign that we have an enemy!*** Oakwood, our enemy has a goal to derail us internally. He knows that if He can trip us up in here, we will be crippled out there!

Therefore we must work out any “stops” in our service to one another. ***Learning to break through the “stops” is necessary to becoming unstoppable.*** This is what the church in Acts did, and we see the result in v.7: *“7 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.”* We see that God blessed their mission and allowed many lives to be changed. The bottom line is that when we serve faithfully, intentionally, and with a godly character, lives will be changed.

So how is God calling you to grow your service to Him? Do you need to faithfully plug into a ministry of the church? Perhaps you need to first uncover your spiritual gifts to know how best to serve. Or perhaps most importantly you need to grow your own godliness. Whatever it is for you, may Oakwood be known as a church that serves for the sake of changing lives and glorifying God.