



The Fear of God – Part 5 And Our Needs Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, as this chilly winter break comes to an end for our school kids, it reminds me of when I was a naive school kid and used to look forward to winter break and then summer vacation and then, of course, graduation ultimately, so that I could be done with all of the tests. I wanted to be done with the tests. And little did I know back then, naively as a kid, that life would be full of tests, that tests would be part of life. And I'm not talking about the tests that examined how much I knew in terms of math or spelling, but I'm talking about the tests that God has ordained for all of his children throughout our Christian lives. God, our master teacher, always putting us here on exam and evaluating us. That's a common part of what the Bible says is going to happen to every Christian. You will be tested. The Bible has warned us.

For Christians, that is critically important how you do in those exams. This last year, we've certainly had our battery of tests, pop quizzes that we didn't think we're coming. And here were these exams that God put before us. And it would be good for us to know not only why these things happen, but importantly how to pass them. And I think for a lot of Christians, they need to know when they're happening. It's one thing to have a pop quiz. At least, you know, when there's a pop quiz, that the quiz has started, even though you didn't know it was coming. But some people don't even know that they're being tested. And we've got to get to the place where we understand that God is examining us. And it's not so that he could learn things about us that he didn't know. Clearly, God knows. It's so that we can learn something about ourselves and where we stand. That's important and what we need to work on and what needs to change and what needs to turn a corner in our Christian life. So we need to understand these tests.

And in Acts Chapter 6, as we continue our study through the book of Acts, we run into a passage of Scripture that at first blush you might say, "I don't see any testing here." Trust me, there's a test going on much like what we have been through here this year and maybe going through individually in your lives right now. We've got to say, look at how this really tested their faith. It tested their view of God, it tested what they believed in and they got through it. Matter of fact, in the last verse in the passage that we're going to study, Acts Chapter 6 verses 1 through 7, you see that they pass this test. God's A+ came down on this text at the bottom of the paragraph and we see that God is pleased with how they got through this. I want to make sure that we can do that, not just corporately, although we'll talk about that. I want to talk about it individually because we'll see how in our lives God is putting us to the test and how we can pass it.

And I think it's good to start in verse 1 to figure out when it's actually happening. So take your Bibles. Don't trust me on this. You actually need to take your Bibles and look at Acts Chapter 6. We're going to read carefully through verses 1 through 7. I can't do that without comment because there's a lot of history here going on. Things we've got to get back in the 1st-century sandals to figure out what's actually happening in this text. And then we'll try to see if we can apply it to the kinds of things that might be going on in your life right now.



So let's look at this in Acts Chapter 6, beginning in verse 1. It says, "Now in these days," now remember what they've been through. They've been through a lot of government mandates, by the way. They've been through a lot of restrictions. They've been through church discipline. Sounds familiar. And they'd been through all-out persecution. They had arrested their pastors, their leaders, and they'd come through that, it seems like with flying colors. They were doing so well and they were. And here comes another form of pressure and test upon the Church. It says this, "In those days when the disciples were increasing in number," it says, "a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews."

Now, you've got to understand that right there. We've got a big church. Remember, this is not a small church. We've got a megachurch here in downtown Jerusalem. They're meeting in this giant expansive area on the Temple Mount. There are probably 10,000 people who are frequently assembling together here in Jerusalem. Peter is the senior preacher and leader of this band. We've got twelve apostles who are ministering and teaching and a lot of people here meeting from house to house and applying the messages and all the rest. So we've got a really big church. And in that church, you've got people who are here described as Hellenists and some that are Hebrews. Now, they're all Jewish people. They're all adhering to what they had come through in their childhood, knowing the Old Testament, knowing the Torah, following the laws of Moses. And then they come to a realization that Jesus was the Christ. They repented of their sins and became a part of the Church. So these are all repented Christians, right? They're all people who are following Christ. But some are described in this verse as Hellenists and some as Hebrews.

Well, that's because in ancient Israel in the 1st-century, we had those who would meet together more comfortably in and more at home in speaking Greek in their synagogues. And we had them in Jerusalem, Greek-speaking synagogues. And then we had those who spoke Aramaic, Hebrew, a form, a dialect of Hebrew. So you had the Aramaic synagogues. You had the Greek-speaking or Hellenized synagogues. They had their own cultures, not that they couldn't understand each other, not that they weren't multilingual, they all were in the 1st-century. But you had all the things that kind of went with that. So you had teams that clearly had formed in Judaism in the 1st-century. And you also have teams here now in the Church starting to form to where one group is complaining against the other group. And you might see that it would be to the advantage if you wanted to be a true Hebrew of Hebrews, as Paul put it, that you would be the Hebrew-speaking or the Aramaic-speaking Hebrew. And so you've got that happening here. The favoritism in the Church shifting to the Hebrew-speaking people over against the Greek-speaking people. And it doesn't mean that they're Gentiles, they're not. But we have this division within the Church and a complaint rose up.

What about? Bottom of verse 1, "Because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution." Now, remember, we've had twice in the book of Acts already a description of how they're meeting one another's needs. And no one is more needy, particularly in the 1st-century, than the widows who lost their breadwinner. Many of them, as you remember, gathering in Jerusalem, not as their hometown, but as their new home. They don't have relatives nearby. They don't have a way to make money. And so the church in particular,



which is much, much better than the Jewish folks before the Church was formed, because you would come to Jerusalem because of the almsgiving during the pilgrimage feasts, you'd come there because it was a metropolitan place where you could beg if you needed to.

But now no one needed to beg in the Church. Matter of fact, the Church had set up a great system where they were giving, giving very generously and guys like Barnabas liquidating their real estate. And they had a big budget here in this megachurch of the 1st-century. And when they were needs, they just met them. Financially, they would meet them. They would buy bread in the marketplace. They'd buy meat. They would come in and feed the people. The problem was in this, really, you can imagine the thousands of people and you might have dozens and dozens of widows here that needed support. They needed to be at the front of the line to get whatever was handed out.

And you had some showing favoritism to the Hebrew-speaking Jewish widows and some putting to the back of the line these Hellenistic or Greek-speaking Jewish widows and this caused the problem. So there's a complaint. We've been through a lot of things in the Church, but now within the Church, we've got some conflict, we've got rivalries, we've got factions, we've got teams that are forming.

So verses 2 through 6, they set out to solve the problem. It says, "And the twelve summoned," the twelve, of course, that's the apostles minus Judas plus Matthias. We learned that in Chapter 1. And so we've got these apostles. These are the primary administrative leaders and the teachers of the Church. They summon the full number of the disciples. They got everyone together, right? Whoever could attend that day, at least, all these people in a big group.

They said and they said it really loudly without microphones, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables." That, by the way, is not a condescending statement because the word "serve" there, if you look down in verse 4, they're going to say, "Here's how we're going to serve." This is just a division of labor. It may seem like one is more public and one comes with more accolades. That may be true, but the apostles here are saying and Peter is simply saying, listen, there's a service that we're not going to do. The administrative work of taking the finances and all the resources and dealing with this big business issue here, the item of trying to serve everyone equally, we can't do that. We're not going to give up our primary responsibility that we have before God, the stewardship that we have, to serve the tables.

"Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you..." And we're assuming if the complaint came from the Greek-speaking, the Hellenistic Jews, he's now pointing to the Hellenistic Jews who are complaining, saying, "You guys, you need to pick out people who are responsible who can do this work." Therefore, "Pick out from among you seven men..." Let's pick some leaders, some managers here, some leaders among the people who have a good reputation. They're of "good repute, they're full of the Spirit." They're not only Christians, but they're walking by the Spirit. They're living good lives and they're wise and of wisdom. They're "full of wisdom whom we will appoint this duty."



We've got responsibilities. You're going to have responsibilities. We're going to broker... you're going to have you broker all of this money and resource here in this particular way. "But we will devote ourselves," now speaking the apostles, to the ministry of prayer and the word, "to prayer and the ministry service of the word." And everyone goes, that's a good idea, verse 5. "And what they had said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose," at the top of the list here, who's going to become the focal point of the end of Chapter 6 and all of Chapter 7, "Steven, a man full of faith," which is critically important, by the way. It's the thing that solves this problem. I know that they're administratively solving this problem, but underlying it all is we'll see as we look at this text is going to be the fact that we have to trust God in the midst of our needs. But, Stephen is a man like that "full of faith," and of course, he's "full of the Holy Spirit," he's walking in step with God's Spirit, "and Philip and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Tamon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte from Antioch."

So there's one guy who came from outside of Judaism and a proselyte. He converted over to Judaism, and yet he's still in the synagogues and grew up in the synagogues and all the rest and he's following the laws of Israel and Moses until he comes to the place of repentance and faith and puts his trust in Christ as what we might call a messianic Jew. But in that sense, he's a messianic proselyte of the Jewish people. So all of these we can assume from the Hellenistic quadrant of the church, the minority group, but the group that was complaining about the fact that the widows weren't being served equally.

Verse 6, they set before the apostles, "These they set before the apostles, and they prayed," the apostles did, "and laid their hands-on them," which again goes all the way back to the book of Leviticus. We've seen this throughout the whole Old Testament. It's a symbolic gesture that is given as we do, and we will do, Lord willing, when we send our Hill Country leadership team off, as the leaders of this church lay our hands-on and show that authorization, the brokering of we're entrusting this important ministry to them. We're delegating this important ministry and authority to them. And that's the picture here. OK, these guys are going to go and they're going to be leaders in the church recognized to do the work and deal with the finances and deal with the logistics of making sure everyone gets served equally. And remember, this is not a church of 120, this is the church of 10,000 people.

"And the word of God," here's the A+ here, "continued to increase." Now that's how it started in verse 1. Things were good. The disciples were increasing in number. Now it ends this way and God continued to bless them in that way. "And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem," both among the Hellenists and among the Hebraic-speaking, the Hebrew-speaking, the Aramaic-speaking Jews. "And a great many of the priests," even, think about that, the priests "became obedient to the faith." OK, that's a long explanation and reading of the text.

But I want to start with verse 1 and remind you that what happens here in this text that I am now categorizing as a test for the Church and I would say a test for every individual widow and a test for every hacked-off Greek-speaking Christian who's saying, "Wait a minute, this isn't right," is the fact that there is a need that is not being met. And when there is a need



that's not being met, I'm trying to say that throughout the Scripture, here's my conclusion, that is a test. That's a test from God.

Number one, if you're taking notes, let's put it down that way, you need to "See Unmet Needs as a Test." See unmet need as a test. If something is not happening the way you think it needs to happen, and of course, I guess I could put that in quotes, because every need here I'm speaking of is a felt need. Right? Every widow, ultimately, she's trusting in Christ, even if she starved to death, would have every need eternally met. But in our temporal needs, the things I think I need, like if you just got an eviction notice because the landlord sold the property you're in and you've got to find a new house. Well, that's a need, right? It's a relative need. It's a felt need, but it's a true need. It's a true temporal need. Well, when you have that need you and say, "I don't know where I'm going to live next month." Right? That's a need.

And as soon as you have that need and you're not sure what's going to happen and the fulfillment of that need is delayed, you're in a test. I guarantee that is what is happening. God is putting you to the test. He's testing things like what do you think of me? What do you believe about me? How robust is your theology? Are you going to shake your fist at me? Do you believe that I'm good? Do you believe that I know? Do you believe that I'm sovereign? There are tests here. Do you trust me? What kind of faith do you have? See when I don't know where my income is going to come from, if I don't know where my food is going to come from, if I've got needs and they might even be secondary or tertiary needs in terms of things, "I don't really need need this, but I feel like I want this. It's appropriate. It's right." Right? Well, then you say, "Well, here's a need. It's being delayed. I prayed. It's not getting answered. And I'm thinking to myself, God, what are you doing?" And the answer is he's testing you. These are tests.

When trials come upon you to grieve you, to quote passages like First Peter Chapter 1 or James Chapter 1, they're there to test your faith. Faith in what? Your faith in God. And so if there's something going on in your life, even as corporately, we can speak like sitting outside in the cold instead of inside. We have a nice, warm building inside of there, and say, "Well, we're not getting what I want. I prayed many times for this to be over quickly. I was hoping that the original thing about flattening the curve in 14 days, we get back in." Our prayers have not been answered. God is making us wait. Well, there is a test, a test for us corporately.

When things don't happen the way we want in the church, there's a test, it's a test, and we got to say, God, you're testing us. The things in your life individually are not happening the way you think they need to happen, if there's deprivation, if there's disappointment, if there's unanswered prayer, those are tests. And it's good to know you're being tested because a lot of people go through all of that. They don't even think that they're being tested and you need to know that. It's critically important.

Well, our series has been entitled "The Fear of God." Well, how does that fit into all of that? Let me show you. Turn with me to Psalm 147. Psalm 147. I want to show you that this is germane to our series and certainly fits with everything we've been talking about because the Bible says that what we need is the fear of God. The fear of God is a good depiction of what it



means to trust the real God of the Bible, particularly in the light and in the shadow of our unmet needs. Did you follow all that?

Listen, now, when it comes to what we are to do as Christians, we are to fear the Lord and the fear of the Lord is a good depiction of what it means to be trusting in the real God who is, a God who is omnipotent, who is powerful, who is omniscient, who knows the details of your life and has every ability to have every widow sitting at a table who doesn't get fed that day to get fed. God could do it, but he's not doing it. And what do you need to do? The Bible says really what you need to do is have the right view of God, a robust theology proper. A robust, healthy biblical view to where even if you don't get what you want, you could say with Job if you had to bury all of your children this week, "The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." That's a robust theology. Right? I mean, I came into the world with nothing. I'm going to leave the world with nothing. That is a huge, robust theology. First Timothy Chapter 6.

That's a theology that says you've got amazing faith. And sometimes when you're made to wait, when there's deprivation, when things you wanted were taken away from you, you say, "Well, that was a need. I can't believe I don't have it anymore," or "this is something that I want. I can't believe I don't get it. All my peers get it. I don't understand." Well, it's a test and the test it needs to be responded to with the fear of the Lord. That you are thinking about and you're trusting in the all-powerful, omnipotent, sovereign God.

Let me show you this from Psalm 147. Take a look at verse 7. Psalm 147:7 says, "Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving," which by the way is what Job was doing when everything in his life, all the needs of his life were not being met. Right? His need to hug his adult children, his need to have a wife who was supportive, his need to have animals in the herds that would help him pay all of the things that he had to pay for, his bank account was decimated. All the needs that he had. Well, he was able to bless the Lord, "Blessed be the name of the Lord," in the midst of all that. This is an amazing faith. And let's just say against the backdrop of a potential unmet need, this is an amazing thing to sing to the Lord. Like Paul and Silas, who were in prison in Philippi, in stocks, and they're singing to the Lord at midnight, even though their need was to be free, their need was not to be beaten. Their need was for a little Neosporin to be rubbed into their backs that were just flayed by the whip.

I mean, they have a lot of needs, but yet they're singing the Lord. They're making melody to God. Well, if their hands weren't in stocks and there was a guitar nearby maybe they would make melody on the lyre. They would have instruments and they would be singing. That would be an amazing act of faith, wouldn't it? Who would they be singing to? Well, the God who "covers the heavens with clouds." I mean, here's a God who makes everything work. "He prepares rain for the earth." We can't even have food coming out of the ground if there's not irrigation and rain on the earth. "He makes the grass to grow on the hills." I mean, he's actually making photosynthesis happen. He's making all the things that happen in this world that produce anything that we need. He's making it happen.



Oh, and "he gives to the beasts their food," animals. So when a widow is sitting there saying, I'm not getting my daily provision of food, the Church is not meeting my need right here, here could be a woman who says, I'm trusting in the Lord because I know even God feeds the beast of the fields. Matter of fact, the birds, "the young ravens," the little ravens that sit there in a nest, "they cry out," they chirp, and God feeds them. Does that sound like what Christ said? Even the birds, they don't gather, they don't store, and your heavenly Father feeds them.

I mean, here's a robust theology God is trying to get us to have in the midst of our unmet desires and our unmet needs to say I'm being tested to see whether or not I believe in the God of the Bible, whether I believe the God that is, a God who feeds and gives. Well, "His delight is not in the strength of the horse." And even in your complaint, you need to be careful that you're not pounding on the table and going, "This church is messed up. I can't believe these apostles. I don't know what's wrong with Peter here." They're trusting in the means by which God is going to solve the problem instead of the giver and provider and the cause of giving what we need. Do you see the difference there?

"God doesn't delight in the strength of the horse. He doesn't take pleasure in the legs of man." It's not about the administrative prowess of the leaders of the church. It's not about whether or not there's a lot of stuff going on here that makes our finances strong, like a horse, if you will. No, no, no. What does God take pleasure in? God takes pleasure in the church, in the widow, in the person, whoever it is, who fears the Lord. "The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him."

And the one who fears him sits back and says this, "I understand that if God has not provided this, I fear him, I trust him, I recognize the great authority and power he has. And he is for some reason not giving me this." The Lord takes pleasure "in those who hope in his steadfast love." There's our word we always talk about in Hebrew. Heseb, his faithful, loyal, promised covenant love. He promises his love. He promises a provision. And those who hope in that, and the only reason you'd need that verb "hope" is if you're not getting what you want right now. Do you follow me?

That's the key. And God takes pleasure in that. If you ask your buddy for five bucks because you're going to run into Del Taco or something, say I need five bucks and he doesn't give to you. Well, that's one thing, right? You may not even have it. I don't know. But you go in and you ask the boss, you put in a check request at a very wealthy company and you go and ask the CEO for some distribution of money and he doesn't give it, there's a whole different perspective there. There's a sense of, "Oh, he may know better than me." I know most of you don't think your bosses know better than you, but let's just pretend that you think your boss knows better than you. Your boss knows, he sees the whole picture, he gets it and he says no to your check request. "I have a need. I have a desire. We need to do this thing for the office or whatever," and he says no.

Is there a sense of "I trust you, I'm not getting what I'm asking, but I'm hoping in the fact that you know what's good, you know what's good for this company? You know what's good for



me." You may be asking for a child, you might be asking for a house, you might be asking for a retirement. You might be asking for health that you don't have right now because your health is in peril. I don't know what it is. But whatever you're asking for, if God says no, do you fear the one who's just said no to your check request? Say, "I trust you." You're asking the God of the universe for food, you widows who sit there and say we're not getting our daily distribution because, you know, those Hebrew-speaking Christians. Right? They those Aramaic-speaking Christians, they don't seem to like us in our Hellenized forms and clothing, and the way we talk and I don't know. They're not doing. Well, no, God's not doing it. Right?

We're supposed to be praying every day, "Give us this day our daily bread." Not make sure those people who are supposed to give us our daily bread, give us our daily bread. Are they going to ask human beings? Absolutely. And you know what? If you need a new house, you ought to talk to a real estate agent. I mean, that's right. But as we've always seen, it's not the strength of the army, right? It's not the chariots, it's not the horses. It's the fact that I'm trusting beyond that because I fear the Lord. The Lord is the ultimate one who owns the cattle on a thousand hills and can give you, you know, a 20,000 square foot house if he wanted to. But if he's not, you don't know where you're going to live next week and you have to downsize into some rental apartment, I'm just saying here is a God who you ought to fear enough to say, "I trust him." I mean, that's the test when you have needs that are not being met.

One more passage really, really quick. Psalm 33, as long as we're in the psalms. Psalm 33. I want you to know, by the way, that the tests matter, how you do with these tests. This passage is not the ideal text to underscore that, but that's certainly the case. God is looking at how we respond to every exam. He's seeing if you're a whiner, if you're a complainer, if you don't trust him, if you shake your fist at him and all that matters, it really does matter in terms of how he's going to respond to you from that point on. I understand justification and that you are accepted and accepted in Christ 100%. But I also understand sanctification in that you can please him or not please him. I think of First Corinthians 10, right? They were all under Moses. They were all under the rock. They were all under the cloud. God was taking care of them, drinking from the rock under the cloud. But with most of them, God was not pleased.

I want God to be pleased. I want to have the report card from our exams, to think of Revelation Chapters 2 and 3, when God looks at churches and say, "well done," just like he says to this church in Jerusalem, "well done." I'm going to continue to increase your impact in the community. All things are going to go well. You're going to start seeing priests become converted here. I want a good grade and that matters. God's looking carefully at how we deal with all this. So see all these things converge in this passage. Psalm 33. Look at verse 13. Let's start in verse 13, "The Lord looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of men." Of course, and that's the whole point in us building this faith. God sees it, sees everything. And "from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all of their deeds." He knows exactly what you think. He knows exactly your heart. He knows your motive. He knows how frustrated you are, how irritated you might be with him. He sees it all.



When it comes to the things that are not happening, maybe there's a threat on your border and then Syria to the north or maybe the Babylonians are coming over. "The king is not saved by his great army," verse 16 and a warrior, individually, not just corporately, but individually, "A warrior is not delivered by his great strength." I mean, it's a good thing for you to train if you're in the army. It's a good thing for you, if you were king, to have a great army. But you're not saved by that. "A warhorse is a false hope." What did we learn from Psalm 147? Our hopes should be clearly placed in God because we fear the Lord. We could have the best army and still lose. Right? We could stay awake and be the watchman in the city, Psalm 127, but if the Lord doesn't watch the city, well, it's useless.

I mean, this is the perspective of a man or a woman who fears the Lord. "The warhorse, a false hope for salvation, by its great might it cannot rescue. Behold, the eye of the Lord is on..." Who? "Those who fear him." Do you see that? But that's the idea, God's going to look to them, "on whose hope," again, here it is, "is in his hesed, his steadfast love." What are we hoping for? "That he may deliver their soul from death and that he might keep them alive in famine." Oh, what should we do? "Our souls should wait for the Lord." See again, it's like hope the word "wait" makes no sense if every time I ask for something, every time I need something, I get it immediately. I'm waiting. I'm hoping. I'm waiting.

Because why? Because, God, "he's our help, he's our shield. For our heart is glad in him." How can that be? I need to get out of this prison in Philippi. Well, here's Paul and Silas. They seem to be happy in the midst of all this. Why? "Because they trust in his holy name." There's a fear. There's a kind of a reiteration of the concept of fear. We fear the holy God, the Seraphim cover their faces. "Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us even as we hope in you," we trust in you.

Now, that's a lengthy explanation of when the test is happening. I haven't even started to give you the answer, and that is we've got to be confident. Confident that God will solve it. Do we just sit on a rock and just wait for it to happen? No. If you need a job, you ought to look for a job. Yeah, I mean, if there are things in your life that you need and you want, you should go after those things. I get the human, you know, means by which God does that. But our hope is always in the right place.

Back to our passage now, Acts Chapter 6 verse 2. They say, "OK, we've got a problem." And the apostles say, "OK, we're going to solve that problem." Now, I'm hoping that all the people in this passage, including Stephen, who is described as a man of faith, he's the kind of who person gets up in the morning and says, as Jesus taught him to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." Now he's going to go among those widows and he's going to say that's where our hope should be. We've got resources. They're not just getting to the people who need it here. So we're going to make sure that happens. But let's all hope in the Lord. But they become the means by which God solves this problem, and that's important. But the whole goal in passing the test is to be like Stephen, who can say, "I trust in God." That's a person who walks by the Spirit.



The answer needs to be in concert with hearts that are absolutely confident in God's provision. Now, let's just jot that down. Let me unpack that a little bit here and maybe bring it to bear on our text. Number two, let's be "Confident in God's Provision," confident. And that's the thing that I think in even all the things you could have said about Steven, to say he's a man of faith, I think the picture is someone who trusts with a confident assurance that God is a God who provides.

Stephen is the key player here, he's described as a man of faith, a faith that in this case is for a bunch of widows who need stuff and they are wanting that stuff. And he says, I'm going to be the means by which that gets brokered and you're going to get that stuff. But he is a man of faith. And so here he is solving needs and his needs, I'm sure, he's trusting God to meet. But you do know where this is going. I said the next chapter and a half is all about Stephen. Do you know what happens to Stephen in the middle of his life? He dies of old age. No. He gets hit by a camel crossing the street. No. What happens? He gets martyred. I'm thinking the need that you have as people are running after you with rocks about to throw them at you, I need this not to happen. And yet he gets killed.

So I get all the realities of what we might need and the things that we think we need, and we need these things right now. I'm just saying I do want us to have that long perspective because Steven, the man of faith, is trusting God, as we'll see, Lord willing, it's a seven-part series, we're going to take through Chapter 7 of Acts. (I just realized... I didn't realize that, it's neat. Seven-part series in Chapter 7.) Sorry. He will die in the end of that passage. (Um, sometimes I just have conversations with myself on the platform.) He'll die trusting God. Why? Because he knows there's something beyond that. There's something beyond that that he's trusting God for.

"Give us this day our daily bread." That is what we should be saying. We're trusting in God for that. "But what if he doesn't?" We'll keep on trusting, fear the Lord. "Yeah, but what if he doesn't and I die of starvation?" My point is this: you should be confident in God's provision and it should extend beyond even the things in your life that you're thinking I need to have right now. Do you need a house? Yes. Do you need food? Yes. Right? Do you need relationships. Yes. You need all of those things. You need money in the bank if you have a medical problem. You need good health if you're going to make it through this life. Well, make it through this life is always going to end with the fact that you're going to have needs at the end of this life. And Stephen is going to have that end of his life accelerated to the very front. I mean, I don't know how old he is, but he's not that old. He dies here as a martyr.

Perhaps when you were in Sunday school, you did a study on the names of God and one of them, at least how they used to say, Jehovah-jireh, remember that from Genesis 22? Right? Yahweh Yireh and that Hebrew combination of words is God's proper name, Yahweh. And the word, I guess the root of the word in Hebrew is "to see," but it's also that God sees with the intent to provide. And I think those are a good combination of concepts. "To see," that's the root of the word. But it means he sees it and sees the need and he's going to respond to the need. And he responds, the Lord provides.



Do you remember when that phrase came out of the text there in Genesis 22? What was happening? Abraham was asked to do what in Genesis 22? Kill his son, which made no sense, but he was obedient. There's a lot of things in your life that you think this didn't make any sense. And when it comes to why God is not doing something, you think, well, this doesn't make sense. It didn't make sense that the child of promise would be the sacrifice on an altar on Mount Moriah. But he takes him up there and as he puts him on the altar, it doesn't make any sense. What he thinks he needs is that child, and rightly so. He does need that child if he's going to have any descendants. And that was the promise. "You'll be a father of a great nation." Well, this is the kid. And yet he takes out his knife and he raises it up to kill his child.

And what happens? The angel shows up and stops him and says, "No." And over his shoulder, there's a ram, an animal, a ram that is caught by the horns in a bush. And he says, sacrifice that. And he takes that substitute, which is a great picture on Mount Moriah that would become the Temple Mount, by the way, and he takes that animal and replaces that animal on the altar and has that animal killed. And then he says, "The Lord sees, Yahweh sees and provides, the Lord provides." That's probably how you learned it, Jehovah-jireh, you know, the Lord provides. And I think to myself, wow, he did but he waited till the eleventh hour, which probably has happened a lot in your life. Right? You think, God, now's the time. Now's the time. Now's the time. And you have examples and maybe you should share them in your small groups as to when God came in at the last minute and seem to solve the problem.

But here's the thing about Abraham. He was convinced that God was going to solve the problem even if he didn't come through at the eleventh hour. How do I know that? How do you know that? Because the New Testament gives us a commentary into Abraham's thoughts in Hebrews Chapter 11, when it says that Abraham in that moment of raising that knife and saying, I'm going to kill my son in obedience to the Lord, he thought the Lord WOULD provide not by an animal caught in the brush. He didn't see that coming, but he thought, even if I have to kill him, I believe that the Lord can raise him from the dead. I can have descendants because God could raise him from... who knows what God is going to do here, but I'll trust him even past any human temporal hope. And that's a kind of trust and confidence that we all need to have.

Because, you know what, you've been praying for is not to get COVID, right? You don't want to be on a ventilator in Mission Hospital and die. But even if you did, you see we've been preaching a lot on that lately, even if you did. See even if the widows starve to death in the early church, even if they died of malnutrition. Even if. Even if everything that you ever wanted and thought you needed as a human being in South County in the 21st-century, even if you didn't get any of that and it all just ended your life, the Bible says even in that the ultimate provision for Stephen was not a long life and dying in a nursing home in Jerusalem, it was being able to die whenever God called him to die and to have the provision that he needed in place. That's a confidence and trust in the provision of God.

Now I'm going to trust in the provision of God. I trust that I'm going to have food to eat. And like David, I can see God stepping in sometimes in the eleventh hour all throughout the lives



of individuals. "As I was young and now I'm old, I've never seen the righteous begging for bread." And nine times out of ten, that's the reality. That is the proverbial reality of us trusting in God. You trust in God, God comes through for his people. You need a place to live. I assume you're not going to be living under an underpass. You're not going to die of exposure. Do you need food? Do you need money? You need something. Those Hellenistic widows need food. They're going to get the food. Just trust in God. Human means are going to accomplish that. And that'll be great.

But even if he didn't, and that's the kind of trust that Job had, where he blessed the Lord when everything around him was gone and he thought, even if I die, do you remember that line from Job? "Even if he slays me, yet will I trust in him." Even if I die, I know my eyes will see my redeemer. There's a trust beyond the reality of this life that if you can trust him for eternity, you can trust him for this stuff. Right?

Which, by the way, I threw out two passages early to talk about trials. I threw out First Peter Chapter 1 and James Chapter 1. First Peter Chapter 1 asked this question, are you even saved if you can't get through this test? If you can't get through this test, are you even a Christian? How in the world can you say that you trust God for eternity and you can't trust him in this trial?

And I would ask you that question. You talk about how important it is for you to pass this test. Can you trust God right now with the things that you are being deprived of? Can you trust him through all of that? And if you can't, if you're like, "I can't take this test. I can't pass this test." Well, then the question would be in First Peter Chapter 1, then where is your faith in God? I mean, if you don't trust God for the wisdom now. Right? You shouldn't expect you'll receive anything from the Lord. Right? I mean, that concept even appearing in James Chapter 1, you should know that Christians, if we trust him for eternity, should be able to trust him for a place to live next month. If you trust him for your eternal life, which every Christian widow in that church in Jerusalem, they all trusted in Christ for eternal life. You can't trust him for a meal? Well, sure you can. Do I need to bring a polite complaint to the leaders? Of course you should. But you're trusting implicitly in a God who is going to provide.

The other one is James Chapter 1, and I would just say in James Chapter 1, the focus is on what kind of strength you should get out of these trials. In other words, when you pass a test, you ought to not just throw those notes away. Right? You ought to say I learned from that and now I'm ready for the next exam, whatever that might be. It says it produces a kind of perseverance and a completeness and a maturity to where you're lacking in nothing. That's what the tests can do for you. Should you try to pass the test that you're in right now? Absolutely. Trusting God, that's the goal, the absolute confidence in God's provision. And the more you get through these tests, the more you're ready to face whatever God might have for you.

Which, by the way, might be the kind of thing that produced faith in Stephen, that allowed him to be the answer to prayer for those widows. Follow me now on this. Think this through. The reality might be that Stephen, who was such a man of faith and I assume Philip and Nicanor



and Timon and all the rest, they were trusting in God because they had learned through their Christian lives and through their life in trusting the Lord that they could be able to be an answer to prayer for other people, that they could be the means by which God provides. In other words, God gets people ready to be useful in his Church because they have learned to trust God for their daily bread and everything else. And all I'm saying is it's the human means by which God solves the problem for these Greek-speaking widows in the early Church are people who are available and ready and trusting in God to do work for God. And I'm just saying that you might be the means by which God is answering someone's prayer and you need to be ready for that. But that's not going to happen unless you pass a few tests. God is going to put in positions of usefulness in the body of Christ people who have gotten through these tests trusting God. I'm assuming Stephen and Phillip and all the rest have been through many tests to where they're ready to be active, useful, fruitful workers. God uses people to meet Christian needs at church. Right? That's why we have to assemble together. We need to meet in small groups. And sometimes we need to ask, politely complain, that this needs to be dealt with and be ready to be the means to answer the prayers of other Christians.

Well, I could preach for several hours on this passage as you're starting to worry that I might, but look at verse 7 and let me just get to the punch line of all of this, where God seems to say A+ guys. Hey, "the word of God continues to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient." Here's what it doesn't say in verse 7. "And everyone was really fat and happy." "Everyone had all the food they could eat." Everyone sat back and said, "Oh, praise the Lord, we are blessed people." That's not what it says. It says and God got his work done through this church.

Here, they had a need and I am assuming they're trusting in God to solve that. That's the only way they're getting an A+ in this exam. And people who trust in Lord solved that. And the Church gets through this crisis in this test and God says, great, now we can move on to get my stuff done. That's not the prosperity gospel. Even if a hint of this sermon here and there, you thought, well, that sounds like the prosperity gospel. Trust in God to meet needs. While I am saying trust in God to meet needs. You need a place to live? I assume he'll give you a place to live. Trust him, ask human beings to help you. Do you need food? Do you need money? Great. Let's get that done. But once he gets that done, why does he give you that provision? Because he has a purpose for you. And guess whose purpose that is? His. His purpose.

Number three, I'd put it this way. You need to "See God's Purposes in His Provisions," see God's purposes in his provisions. And it's a cute and memorable way to say it. But whatever God demands and requires of us, he certainly supplies for. Right? Whatever he commands he's going to provide for. And here's what he's commanded for the early church, "Be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and ends of the earth." And guess what they were supposed to do, "Make disciples of all the nations." They were supposed to "teach them to obey everything that Christ commanded." And guess what's happening in this passage? You want to see God's purposes? Well look at it. Number one, the truth is going out, verse 7, "the word of God continued to increase" Number two, "the disciples were being multiplied greatly."



And number three, "people were being obedient." Those three things are the things that God wanted to do with that church. He meets the needs so that they can do his purpose.

That doesn't fly very well in a modern 21st-century evangelical church these days. I mean, I'm hoping more and more churches get this. But if the center of the theological universe is you, then God is there as a butler, as a life coach, as a provider to give you what you want so you can be fat and sassy and have all that you want as the Christian, and it'll be great. You fly your blessed posters and all that and it's great, and I'm just a blessed child of the Lord, "bling," "bling," whatever. I don't know what it is. It's way out of my circle there doing that stuff.

But think about it. The Bible says, I've got a purpose. I'm taking you through the exams, not so that you can sit around and say, "look at what I got," but so I can use you. Matter of fact, one passage here, I've even had people just hate it when you say God uses. They don't like that. That's the point. We are his servants. He uses us for his purposes. Is he good to his servants? Oh, yeah. God is really good to his servants, but we're here for his purpose.

Let me give you this one passage. Right? Last cross-reference. Go to Isaiah. In the book of Isaiah, Chapter 48, there are so many passages I could look to and I looked at several to think about how I could best describe how this church gets through their needs. They trust God to meet their needs with guys who trust the Lord and then God blesses them by utilizing them for his purpose. But I settled on this one because it clearly makes a great picture of even the trials in our lives and why God gets us through them. And here's the point. Look at verse 10. "Behold," Isaiah 48:10, "I have refined you, but not as silver; I've tried you in the furnace of affliction." I put you through tough times. "For my own sake." And God doesn't stutter, but he's going to say it twice, so we get it. "For my own sake, I do it."

OK, even in verse 9, look up the verse ahead of it, "For my namesake, I deferred my anger." I didn't destroy you even though you got an F and I should have failed you in the last exam, man, I didn't destroy you. "I deferred my anger for the sake of my praise I restrained it for you. I restrained it for you that I might not cut you off." I've got a promise. I've got a fulfillment. I want to do good things through, in that case, Israel in the Old Testament. And so I'm going to keep with you. I'm going to hang in there, I'm going to endure with you.

Verse 10, "I've refined you, not as silver. I've tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned?" I don't want that. I want the Church to go forward in our case in Acts Chapter 6. I want the priest to become obedient to the faith. I want the truth to spread. "How should my name be profaned? My glory I won't give it to another." I'm not going to give it to you. I'm not going to give it to anyone else. God is great. He's at the center of all this. People read the Bible. They don't know it. The skeptics read it, "Man, God sure is selfish and self-centered." And you're absolutely right he is because he is the center. How horrible it is to have some kind of false humility. Right? The greatest golfer in the world saying, "I'm terrible at it." Right? You think, "Stop." Right? God cannot NOT be the center of everything. When it comes to why he takes you through your trials, it's for his glory, his purpose. So when you get that job, you have that baby, you get that relationship, you get that raise, you get that house, you get whatever it is that you think you need or that



meal on the table, even whatever you eat or drink, do it all for the glory of God. Everything. And that's the point.

What are his purposes? Maybe you are coming through a test. Maybe we as a church are coming through the test. We're saying, "OK, well, we had a weird year here this last year." And I mean, inconvenient, really, is a big part of it. And I mean, it's not full-blown persecution, but it's a hassle. What did we learn? Did we trust God? Did we come through this? Did we pass this test? Now, how can we utilize what we've learned in this and what God has done to get us through it for his glory, for his purpose?

I got a text from my daughter on New Year's Day. She texted me with great joy and excitement and gratitude, and it caught my attention not because my 18-year-old is not grateful, but it did kind of strike me the enthusiasm of her text, like, whoa! And so I see what it is. She's excited and thankful for me about the Daily Bible Reading. And I'm thinking, OK, I read the Daily Bible Reading this morning, what was the Daily Bible Reading today? Ahhh. We are in Genesis 1 and 2, not the creator of the world. Um, that's nothing there, I don't think. And then, Oh Matthew 1 I thought, uhhh, Matthew 1? It's a long list and it's the genealogy passage of Christ. It's like what is going on with you.

And then I realized. Her gratitude was in all of those names in that passage. She had just gotten through and just finished up the Old Testament survey class that I happened to be the professor and teacher in at Compass Bible Institute, and she'd finished her first college class with dad as the teacher. And I thought to myself, well, this is a little different attitude than I had during the semester when I was taking her through ancient Near Eastern history and getting familiar with the kings of Israel and a little bit about the exile and the restoration and the key players and all that and all that was a lot of work. "And I got another task. I can't believe you did another pop quiz. I had the final. Seems impossible." I got a lot of all that during the testing. But now on New Year's Day, when she can read those names and go, "I know those names. I know what's going on. I get all that. It's so insightful. I love the genealogies." Right? I'm thinking, OK. That's really different, but it's the product of going through the tests, is it not?

And it's not so she can go around and go, "Now, I can win Bible trivia against my brothers," you know, that's not what she's saying. I mean, I really think there's an excitement, not only because it's edifying to us to have a firm grasp on God's word, but now there's a sense of ability to use the word of God in people's lives.

How ready now am I to have a better grasp on the word to be useful as a counselor, as a teacher, as someone who can do good in other people's lives? I mean, if you can just get that in your mind, I mean, then all of a sudden I get it. The tests were painful, but passing them is important because the product on the other side is a usefulness and even an enjoying the fact, as Paul put it, that he's just overjoyed, just he's humbled by the fact that he can be a tool in God's hand and be useful for the kingdom. How good it is for us to do that, as unworthy as we feel. But your unworthiness and I'll drive you to this in your small groups this week, because it's one of the passages I'll turn you to in Exodus, is it you can because of your lack



of faith, even in the midst of that, you can fail to be useful as that tool because you're just like Moses. "I can't do it. I can't do it. I can't do it." And you can do it. God can make you the Stephen, the Nicanor, the Timon, the Philip in the church and in the people that you run with because you've gotten through the tests. So know when you're in them, know why God gives them, and let's this week make sure we pass them.

Let's pray. God, the unmet needs in our lives, we don't like it and some are really painful. We can only imagine how painful it was for Job to bury his family members and the needs he had. His health was taken away. And yet, God, he was there and had that kind of confidence, a theology that was able to say, "God sees, God knows, God is good," even when we're made to wait and hope in a love that is yet to be manifested through our needs being met. And while we continue to pray for our daily bread, we continue to pray for the things in our lives that we need, God we want to trust you enough to know that those times of testing, they refine us, that affliction makes us stronger, more useful. As James 1 says, a kind of completeness. A preparedness. As Ephesians 2 says, for whatever the good work might be, because we were created in Christ Jesus for good works, that we would walk in them and we want to do that. We want to be like Stephen, like Philip, like that list of leaders within the Church. And we want to be the kinds of people who get through these trials with an A+. So help us God to endure through it all. Even these things that we're going through corporately to come out the other side as a stronger church, a more effective church, a more fruitful church that you would bless with increasing the word of God in our community, multiplying disciples, and calling more people to obedience, the obedience of the faith.

In Jesus name. Amen.