

Gathered to Lead

Rich Nathan
July 31 & August 1, 2021
Gathered
Acts 6:1-7

If someone was going to carve a new Mount Rushmore of the world's greatest leaders from the 20th century, who do you think ought to be on that Mount Rushmore? Who would be the four or five people whose faces should be on 20th century's world's greatest leaders?

Let me suggest a few leaders who would be on many people's lists of the world's greatest leaders of the 20th century. How about Nelson Mandela?

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Photo of Mandela

Or Winston Churchill

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Photo of Churchill

Certainly you'd have to include Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Photo of MLK

What about Mahatma Gandhi?

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Photo of Gandhi

Of course, every time you try to create a list of the greatest – we could be talking about the greatest football players of all time or the greatest guitarists or scientists – there are lots of debates. You might be thinking, "My Mount Rushmore of the greatest leaders of the 20th century would have included Mother Theresa

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Photo of Mother Theresa

What about Billy Graham?

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Billy Graham photo

Or W.E. B. DuBois

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Photo of DuBois

For those of you not familiar with him, W.E.B. DuBois was the first African American to earn a doctorate in the United States. He became a professor of history, sociology and economics. He helped to found the NAACP.

Closer to home, there are two people who are part of Vineyard Columbus who are great leaders. One who is a pastor and another who has been a long-time church member.
Pastor Diane Bauman

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Photo of Diane

who has led our Value Life ministry for the past 20 plus years. Diane and her ministry team have come alongside thousands of women who are facing unintended pregnancies. They offer a real alternative to abortion, providing emotional, spiritual, material and relational support for women who are deciding whether to keep their unborn babies. Through Diane and her team's work, thousands of babies have been born alive. She is a leader worthy of our respect!

Then there's Amy. Amy works full time for Columbus City Schools as a speech pathologist. But for the past six years, in addition to her full time job, she has served in our 5th Avenue Food Pantry almost every single Wednesday evening of the year. She serves meals to the homeless, prays for people, mentors a woman who lives in a tent behind the Columbus Convention Center, offers friendship to dozens of folks who come to our pantry every Wednesday night. Amy is a leader.

How would you define who is a leader? There is a ton of definitions. Let me give you a couple of definitions of leadership.

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A leader is somebody who sees things that need to be improved and rallies people towards a better vision for life.

A leader is somebody who has vision for a better way to do life. A leader can rally people toward that vision. Another even simpler definition of leadership is:

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A leader is a person who influences others to serve God's purposes in the world.

Is there anyone listening to me right now who says, "I am a follower of Jesus, but I have no desire to influence other people to serve God's purposes in the world." Honestly, I wonder, can you be a true follower of Jesus Christ and not care to influence someone else in accomplishing God's good and loving purposes in this world? I don't think so.

We're doing a series here at Vineyard Columbus from the New Testament book of Acts. The series is titled "Gathered". What is it that we're gathered for? Why don't we all just do our own thing? Why does God pull us together in a church community? What is his purpose in calling us to gather? One reason the Lord calls the church to gather is for the purpose of leading. I've called today's talk "Gathered to Lead". Let's pray.

Slide Acts 6:1-7

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. ² 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. ³ 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 ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

⁵ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

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.

Let's read Acts 6:1 again:

Slide Acts 6:1

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.

There are so many people these days lamenting the church's problems. "I can't believe how messed up the church is. I wish we could go back in history to a time when the church didn't have any problems!"

There's never been a time in history when the Christian church hasn't had problems. People talk about returning to be more like the early church. I think to myself, "Have you ever read the New Testament?" Which early church would you like to recreate? The church in Corinth with its lawsuits and sexual immorality and division or the church in Galatia with its legalism? How about the church in Ephesus with its false teaching? Or maybe the church in Thessalonica with its poverty and persecution?

The Christian church has always faced problems internally and externally.

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The church always faces problems

Why is it that until the Lord returns, the church is always going to have problems? Why is it that you and I will never be able to go to a church that doesn't have problems?

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Satan creates problems

We in the 21st century try to pretend that there's no such thing as spiritual warfare. The book of Acts is really clear that Satan is always stirring up problems for the church. If you go back in Acts 4, Satan stirs up persecution against the early Christians. In chapter 5, Satan stirs up corruption in the early church. And here in chapter 6, Satan stirs up disunity in the church. We are not playing the game of church or the game of life by ourselves. There's another team on the field! He constantly throws things at the church to hinder progress and to slow the spread of the gospel. Why did the early church face problems?

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Diversity creates problems

We read that there was a dispute between the Hellenistic – or Grecian – Jews and the Hebraic Jews concerning the treatment of Grecian Jewish widows.

Slide Acts 6:1

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.

Let me give you a little background to this dispute. Hellenistic or Grecian Jews were generally drawn from other parts of the Roman empire. These were Jewish people who also spoke Greek as their first language. Quite often when they went to synagogue services, the services were conducted in Greek. These Jews were shaped by Greek philosophy and culture.

The other Jews were called Hebraic Jews. Many of these Jews probably came from the Promised Land. They conducted their services not in Greek, but often in Hebrew. The language they spoke in their homes was likely Aramaic – a language closely related to Hebrew. Many of these Hebraic Jews also spoke Greek. A huge number of Jews in the Promised Land were bi-lingual, but they were uncomfortable with the degree to which

some Jews had adopted Greek culture. There was a culture clash. Jews from different cultures, speaking different languages.

Have you noticed that diversity causes problems? Let's apply this to our own church and our diversity. Vineyard Columbus is not just reaching a single generation. We're not all young and we're not all old. Baby Boomers are worshiping together here with Millennials and Gen Zers. We have huge economic diversity and huge diversity in education and political perspectives. There is nothing anyone could say about any controversial issue that isn't going to offend someone at some point. We draw people from 130 different nations and our cultures and family backgrounds train us to approach life differently.

Friends, it is so much easier to create a church of people who are exactly like us in political perspective, in age, in education, in the teams we root for and the foods we like. It's a basic sociological principle that birds of a feather flock together. It doesn't take a miracle to build a church filled with people who are all the same.

What we are trying to do at Vineyard Columbus is to create a church that can only be held together by our miracle-working God. See, I've always wanted to be part of a church where - when we gather, people look at us and say - only Jesus could have done this. The only reason these folks are together is Jesus! This church is a miracle! But diversity creates problems.

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Christian faith creates problems

You know, often when a person gives their life to Jesus and they make the decision that Jesus is going to be Lord, they face immediate backlash, especially if they are coming from another religion - if they're coming out of Islam or Hinduism or Buddhism or Judaism or maybe their family was nominal Christians but they don't take their faith too seriously. Part of the reason there may have been a problem for the Grecian widows is they were Jewish women who normally would have been cared for by local synagogues. But these Grecian Jewish widows became followers of Jesus and believed he was the Jewish Messiah. The welfare system that was administrated by local synagogues cut them off. We can't be sure about this, but this is what many historians believe. So here they are. They are poor widows who have come to Jesus and have had their financial support cut off by local synagogues because of their Christian faith. They have no local family in the Promised Land to care for them and now they've come to the church. There's no social safety net for them at all. How is the church going to respond?

We know how we would have responded here at Vineyard. There were two recessions we faced in the last decade or so - one in 2008 and the last one during the pandemic - this church stepped up. We gave over \$1 million during these two recessions to help church members who were out of work. The church helped people find jobs. The

church helped provide basic necessities. The church rallied to care for our own people and to extend help to our community.

But to have a church step up in times of a crisis requires leadership. Here's what we read in verses 2 and 3.

Slide Acts 6:2-3

² 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. ³ 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

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Leaders address problems

The apostles could have been men who ignored these widows or prayed that they would go away. They could have swept the problem under the rug. They could have said: We're growing so quickly. These Greek Jews are just whiners, they don't approve of all the good things we're doing. We don't need to pay attention to the naysayers. But the apostles were good leaders and good leaders address problems.

Avoiding problems is no way to lead a business. Avoiding problems is no way to lead a family. And avoiding problems is no way to lead a church. Problems are way easier to deal with when they're small than when they get big.

If you've talked with anyone who has raised a child, they will tell you it's way easier to deal with a mouthy five year old than a mouthy 15 year old. If you have a child who is under the age of 10, listen to the wisdom of the book of Proverbs:

Slide Proverbs 19:18 NASB

Discipline your son while there is hope,
And do not desire his death.

Challenging your spouse's credit card habits is way easier when there's a hundred dollar credit card bill than when there's a \$10,000 credit card bill. Newly married folks, listen to me now, it's infinitely easier to deal with issues in the first couple of years of marriage. Something that bothers you – patterns of communication, patterns of handling conflict, patterns in your sexual life – that you don't like, they are easier to deal with in the first couple of years of marriage. It's way easier to correct problems early on instead of trying to address them after 20 years of hurt, disappointment and frustration. When the cement is still wet and still able to be formed, you can fix things so much easier. That's the time to deal with issues. But if you wait, the cement hardens. It takes dynamite to blast through the hardened patterns.

So let me ask you – are you someone who avoids talking about problems? Are you someone who sweeps problems under a rug? Or do you address problems as they come up? Leaders deal with problems.

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Leaders know their calling

Years ago I was interviewed by someone who was working on their doctorate in the area of church growth. This man was interviewing pastors of rapidly growing churches and he picked me. He asked, “Why is your church growing?” I said, “I don’t know. Lots of churches pray as much as our church does. Lots of pastors are definitely as faithful to Christ as I am. I don’t know why our church is growing. It’s God.”

He said: “Every church has God so what makes Vineyard Columbus any different?” I said, “I really don’t know exactly, but there is one thing that I’ve noticed about many leaders. Many pastors and many leaders don’t know who they are so they are always trying to be something they are not. When people discover their own calling, their own created identities before God, they stop trying to be someone else. That’s when a leader becomes really affective!

Good leaders actually know who they are. And they know who they are not. They know their calling and they give themselves to that. When the apostles say that it wouldn’t be right to neglect the ministry of the Word of God and wait on tables, Luke uses the same word for ministry – speaking about the ministry of the Word – and the ministry of these tables.

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Diakonia = service

Diakonia is where we get our word “deacon” from. The apostles are saying, “Listen, we know there are lots of different ways to serve. You can serve God by preaching God’s Word. You can serve God by feeding the hungry. There are a thousand ways to serve.

I want to talk about one way for anyone who has any money at all to immediately serve the poor in our community. There are many kids who are preparing to go back to school who are facing challenges. Often, they return to school without the basic items needed to learn and grow. This year, kids have even more challenges, sharing limited resources, space and technology with their siblings and parents at home. We can’t address every problem kids will encounter, but with YOUR HELP, we can make sure they have the basic supplies they need for this school year. Will you help!?! On our website there’s more information.

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School Supply Drive

and bring your donations to worship services next Sunday, August 8, 2021.

Leaders know their calling and...

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Leaders are qualified to lead

Acts 6:3 gives us three qualifications for a church leader.

Slide Acts 6:3

³ 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

Now, it's not as clear in the NIV as it was in the original Greek. The New American Standard Bible brings it out pretty well. Here's what we read:

Slide Acts 6:3 NASB

Instead, brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

We see the same thing in the English Standard Version

Slide Acts 6:3 ESV

Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

Three qualifications – three tests – to qualify leaders of any significant ministry in the church.

1. They have to have a good reputation.
2. They have to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
3. They must have wisdom.

I think one of the major problems in the church today is that we neglect these three tests. We have made the sole criterion for church leadership to be gifting, charisma, talents. We don't ask whether the potential leader has a good reputation. Are they full

of the Holy Spirit? Are they wise people? These are the only folks we want leading a church.

Let's look at these three qualifications as we finish up today. We're talking about being gathered to lead. As followers of Jesus, we want to be people who influence others to accomplish God's purpose in the world. What kind of people do that?

First, leaders have to have a good reputation.

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Leaders must have a good reputation

All through the Bible, we're taught about the importance of maintaining a good name or a good reputation. Proverbs 22:1 says this:

Slide Proverbs 22:1

A good name is more desirable than great riches;
to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.

A good reputation is a constant requirement of leadership in the Bible. We read this in 1 Timothy regarding the qualifications for being an elder in the church:

Slide 1 Timothy 3:7

⁷ He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

Let me ask you a question. What's your reputation? What's the first thing that someone at your job or your former job would say about you when your name is mentioned? What's the first thing that your next door neighbor would say about you when your name is mentioned? What's the first thing your roommate in your dormitory or fellow students in your classes or on your team would say about you? What's your reputation?

Would people say about you: Oh, they're great people! They are real Christians. He's such a hard worker. She's such an encourager. They're the best employee that I have. If I lost her on our team, I don't know what I'd do. He's so kind. She's such a great human being. I love having her as a neighbor. Best teammate ever!

What is your reputation? Would some of you say that your reputation might be negative? He's wholly unreliable. The biggest mistake I ever made was hiring him. She's always fighting with someone. All they do is complain.

Let me press this home. Are you a leader? What is your reputation? When people say your name – is it a blessing? Are you a bright spot on an otherwise gray day? Does

somebody say about you, “I thank the Lord because of you!” Don’t you want to be the sort of person that people thank God for you? “I’m so grateful you’re in my life.”

You know, if you don’t like some of the answers to some of these reputation questions, then with God’s help, you can change your reputation. You don’t always have to have a reputation of being a goof-off or unreliable or a disappointment. God can change anybody who wants to change. There’s hope for all of us! There’s a famous song here at Vineyard called “I will Change Your Name”. Listen to what the Lord is saying to you:

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I will change your name
You shall no longer be called
Wounded, outcast, lonely or afraid

I will change your name
Your new name shall be
Confidence, joyfulness, overcoming one
Faithfulness, friend of God
One who seeks My face

To be a leader, we need to have a good reputation. What’s the second qualification?

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Leaders must be full of the Holy Spirit

Slide Acts 6:3

³ 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

The apostles never confused secular leadership and spiritual leadership. It doesn’t matter if you’re a CEO of a major corporation, a professor at a university with a PhD, a famous politician or a football coach of a Division 1 college. That doesn’t qualify you for leadership in Jesus’ church. We must never confuse secular leadership and spiritual leadership. That’s one of the biggest problems in the church today. Just because someone has made a ton of money in the business world or you’re well known in the community, that doesn’t mean they become a leader in the church. But churches constantly confuse secular success and spiritual leadership. The bottom-line requirement for leadership in the church is being Spirit-filled.

What does it mean to be full of the Holy Spirit? It means that you’re a person who regularly yields your mind and your emotions and your will to the control and direction of the Holy Spirit. Being Spirit-filled means that you’re a person who is regularly welcoming to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. You want to be dominated by the Spirit. You are constantly asking for the Spirit’s leading in your decision making, in

your relationships, in your speech, in your appetites and your finances. You regularly say: I yield to your control, Holy Spirit.

Let me ask you. Would you say about yourself, "I am a Holy Spirit dominated person. I regularly bring my whole life under the mastery of the Spirit."? If you say, "No, that's not true of me." It could be true of you. You could yield the control of what you say to the Holy Spirit. You could yield your relationships, your sex life, your finances to the Holy Spirit. You could say, "Lord, take control of this." You could qualify for Christian leadership!

Good leaders must have a good reputation. They must be full of the Holy Spirit. And third,

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Leaders must be wise

The apostles showed wisdom in this whole selection process. They understood that they were dealing with a hot potato. We're dealing with an issue that's fraught with sensitivities, racial sensitivities. The apostles set up the requirements of leadership and then said to the Greeks who were complaining: "You choose."

According to the book of Proverbs, wisdom is a skill in living. A person is wise when they have skill in relating to God. Skill in relating to all kinds of people. A person is wise when they have skill in dealing with all kinds of circumstances, skill in managing their money, skill in offering advice to other people, skill in navigating conflict.

When we choose leaders in the church, we ought to be asking questions like: does this person's life generally work pretty well? Does their marriage work pretty well? Do their friendships work pretty well? Are they someone who is regularly sought after for advice and counsel? Do they know how to handle tricky situations or are they like bulls in a china shop just knocking over stuff, smashing everything? Are their finances a mess? Are their relationships a mess?

Brothers and sisters, let me ask you a question. Are you a leader? Do you have a good reputation? Are you full of the Holy Spirit? Are you wise? Are you someone who wants to influence others to fulfill God's purpose? Are you a leader? Do you want to be a leader?

Gathering info.