

**"THE CHURCH ROOTS AND
REACH -**

LESSONS FROM ACTS"

PRINCIPLES FOR TODAY'S CHURCH

WEEK 4

**SEPTEMBER 23RD
AND SEPTEMBER 24TH**





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OBEDIENCE TO THE SPIRIT

Opportunities to share the gospel message
come through obedience.



UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

USE THE FOLLOWING PAGES TO PREPARE FOR YOUR GROUP TIME.

The martyrdom of Stephen set off a scorching outbreak of persecution against Christians in Jerusalem; it was led by Saul of Tarsus, a firebrand Pharisee (see Acts 8:1-3). Many believers were forced to flee the city and seek refuge in other places. Wherever they scattered, however, they took the gospel message with them (see v. 4).

Philip, who like Stephen had been among the seven men set apart to carry out the church's ministry to widows (see 6:5), went to the region of Samaria. There he began proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. Philip's preaching was accompanied by powerful signs, including the expulsion of evil spirits from some people and the physical healing of others. A sense of joy spread over the whole area (see 8:5-8).

Among the Samaritan converts was a well-known former sorcerer named Simon. He professed to believe in Jesus and was baptized, yet he was astonished most by the miraculous works Philip performed (see vv. 9-13). When Peter and John came from Jerusalem to Samaria and laid hands on the new converts to receive the Holy Spirit, Simon offered to buy that power from the two apostles. Peter rebuked Simon and urged him to repent of making such a sinful request (see vv. 14-25).

Philip followed the Lord's direction to leave Samaria and go to a road running between Jerusalem and Gaza. There he came upon an Ethiopian, an important official in the royal court, who was reading a scroll of Isaiah as he rode along in his chariot. Philip greeted the man and soon had an opportunity to explain how Jesus fulfilled the prophecy that the man was reading. The Ethiopian declared his faith in Jesus, and Philip baptized him. The man then went on his way as a new believer, while Philip moved to other coastal towns, preaching the gospel everywhere he went (see vv. 26-40).

"SYMPATHY IS NO
SUBSTITUTE FOR ACTION."

—David Livingstone

➤ ACTS 8:26-31,35,38-39

Think About It

Identify phrases in this passage that show the depth of Philip's daily walk with the Lord.

How did Philip's walk with the Lord influence his actions?

26 An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip: "Get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is the desert road.) **27** So he got up and went. There was an Ethiopian man, a eunuch and high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to worship in Jerusalem **28** and was sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading the prophet Isaiah aloud. **29** The Spirit told Philip, "Go and join that chariot." **30** When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you're reading?" **31** "How can I," he said, "unless someone guides me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

35 So Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning from that Scripture.

38 Then he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. **39** When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer. But he went on his way rejoicing.



EXPLORE THE TEXT

COMPELLED TO SEEK (*Acts 8:26-29*)

²⁶An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip: “Get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is the desert road.) ²⁷So he got up and went. There was an Ethiopian man, a eunuch and high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to worship in Jerusalem ²⁸and was sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading the prophet Isaiah aloud. ²⁹The Spirit told Philip, “Go and join that chariot.”

Like a storm wind that catches up seeds and then drops them far and wide onto new ground, the persecution against the church in Jerusalem scattered hosts of gospel witnesses into new areas. Wherever these believers went, they talked about the good news of Jesus Christ, which took root in many hearts. Luke gave an example of this phenomenon in the account of Philip in Samaria (see vv. 5-8). The gospel advanced in other ways too, including by what might be called divine appointments between an attentive, obedient believer and a spiritual seeker. Luke gave an example of this type of gospel advance in the account of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (see vv. 26-39).

Luke began the account by reporting that an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip. An angel is a messenger from God, so the instructions for Philip emphasize God's perfect timing and guidance, the urgency of evangelism, and God's expectation of obedience.

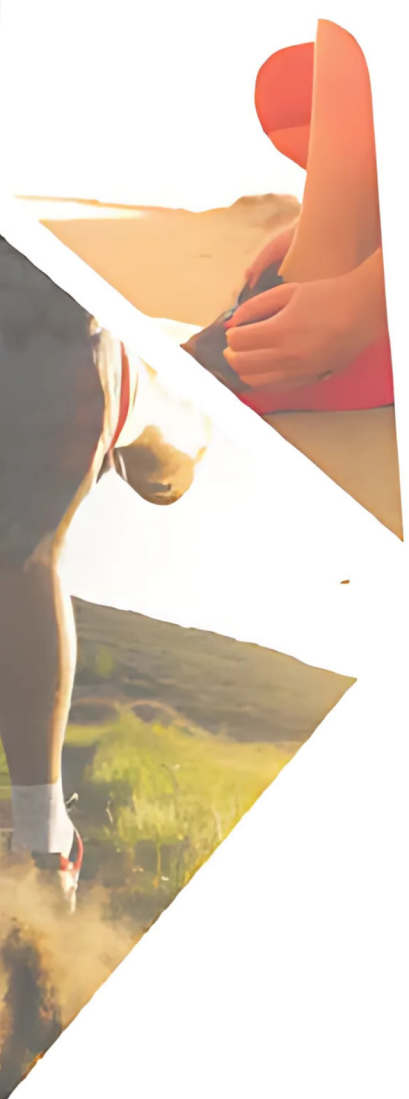
Moreover, the angel gave Philip clear details about the destination: he was to head south and go to a road that ran between Jerusalem and the city of Gaza near the Mediterranean coast. Yet the angel didn't reveal at this time the purpose of Philip's journey. So these details reveal not only the exactness of God's guidance but also the need for a believer to trust and obey the Lord step by step.

Notice the profound simplicity of Philip's response. He obeyed in faith, and he obeyed immediately. As believers today, we can learn a lot from Philip's obedience. God may prompt us to go to unexpected places or to prepare ourselves in unexpected ways to meet a strategic need. Traveling along the road in a horse-drawn chariot was an Ethiopian man. In biblical times the name Ethiopia was associated with the land of Cush in the upper Nile River valley rather than with the present-day nation of that name located at the southwestern end of the Red Sea.

Luke provided additional information about this Ethiopian man. First, he was a eunuch. In ancient Near Eastern societies this term often referred to a man in charge of a king's harem. The eunuch was rendered sexually impotent by means of castration. Over time the term also came to be used of men—usually royal officials—who served the queen or other female members of the royal court and who took a vow of sexual abstinence as part of their service.

Second, the man was a high official of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians. Indeed, he was the queen's chief financial officer. As such, he played a key role in the financial well-being of the entire nation. Third, the man had been in Jerusalem to worship at the temple. This fact suggests the man was (or hoped to be) a proselyte to Judaism. The law of Moses forbade eunuchs from entering the Lord's assembly (see Deut. 23:1); however, the prophet Isaiah foresaw a day when eunuchs who obeyed God's Word would be welcomed into God's presence (see Isa. 56:3-5). Perhaps the Ethiopian found hope in reading these words of Isaiah.

The phrase "sitting in his chariot" (Acts 8:28) suggests that the chariot was large and had a driver. More significant, however, is the fact that the man was reading aloud from the prophet Isaiah as he rode along. This suggests the man was educated, was wealthy enough to own a handwritten copy of a biblical scroll, and was concerned enough



about his spiritual condition that he traveled hundreds of miles to and from Jerusalem by chariot to find answers. A person truly thirsty for God will go to great lengths to satisfy that need. Once again Philip received a divine direction. Interestingly, this time the guidance came not through an angel but directly from the Spirit.

What are means the Lord uses today to direct believers in carrying out the gospel mission? How do faith and obedience factor into those means?

PREPARED TO SHARE (*Acts 8:30-31,35*)

³⁰When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you’re reading?”
³¹“How can I,” he said, “unless someone guides me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³³So Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning from that Scripture.

Philip followed the Holy Spirit’s direction and ran to the chariot. Do you suppose that as he ran, Philip thought about potential obstacles that might hinder his witness?

Many believers today wrestle with similar kinds of thoughts and sometimes allow the fear of inadequacy to dampen their passion for witnessing. Philip’s example encourages us as believers to trust and obey the Holy Spirit, for He is at work around those who need to hear the gospel, in the witnessing situations to which He has guided us, and in our own fearful hearts.

Philip initiated the encounter by watching and listening. He noticed the man was reading a passage aloud, and he listened closely enough to recognize the text was from Isaiah 53. Paying close attention to what captures another person’s interest can often open a door of opportunity to talk about spiritual matters. Respect and flexibility are key qualities in effective evangelism. Also notice that Philip asked a respectful yet probing question. A good question can break down barriers and open the flow of communication about the gospel.

KEY DOCTRINE

Baptism

Baptism is an act of obedience symbolizing a believer’s faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior; the believer’s death to sin; the burial of the old life; and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus.

BIBLE SKILL

Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.

Read Luke 23:43 and Ephesians 2:8-9. How does Jesus' promise to save the repentant thief demonstrate Paul's teaching that salvation comes by faith alone? Now read Ephesians 2:10. In what way can believers consider water baptism a good work and therefore not a requirement for salvation?

What questions could you use today to initiate a conversation about spiritual matters with an unsaved friend? How about with a person you just met?

The doctrine of the clarity of Scripture teaches that the Bible can be understood by an ordinary reader. It isn't written in a secret code that only a select few can decipher. Yet neither is it a text of which each person's private interpretations are necessarily true and correct. Thus, the Ethiopian official invited Philip to come up and sit with him in the chariot. The official, an expert in financial matters, humbly welcomed an opportunity to learn from Philip what a key Bible passage meant.

Acts 8:32-33 reveals that the Ethiopian official was reading Isaiah 53:7-8, which speaks of the Messiah's unjust suffering and death. The sticking point for the Ethiopian seems to have hinged on the identification of the Suffering Messiah (see Acts 8:34).

Philip used this opening to tell the man the good news about Jesus. (Jesus' fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy is one of Luke's major themes in the Book of Acts.) A consistent Christian lifestyle and a respectful witnessing approach speak volumes about the Lord Jesus. Yet at some point a verbal presentation of the gospel is necessary so that unbelievers can hear and respond in faith to Jesus (see Rom. 10:14-17).

How did Philip use Scripture to point to Jesus? Why was it important for Philip to make this connection?

FOCUSED ON SALVATION (Acts 8:38-39)

³⁸Then he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. ³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer. But he went on his way rejoicing.

It is possible that during his visit to Jerusalem, the official had seen converts baptized as followers of Christ. At some moment on his journey home, the Ethiopian believed in Jesus. He then wanted to know from Philip whether anything disqualified him, as it did in Judaism, from being baptized as a believer (see v. 36).

Because he professed faith in Jesus, nothing disqualified the Ethiopian eunuch from being baptized (see v. 37). Consequently, when they saw a body of water, the official commanded the chariot to stop, the two men went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. In the New Testament the significance of baptism is never isolated from the method—immersion in water. Baptism signifies a believer's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Baptism doesn't save anyone; Jesus alone saves.

How would you use this passage to explain baptism to someone? What other information would you need to give them a more complete picture?

After the Ethiopian's baptism the Holy Spirit carried Philip away to another place of service. Whether this was a miraculous exit or simply the way Luke described the two men's parting isn't clear. In any case the Ethiopian man went on his way rejoicing. Joy is a characteristic associated with faith in Jesus; it's a sign of new life.



➤ OBEY THE TEXT

Believers must recognize opportunities to share Jesus with others as directed by the Holy Spirit. Believers gain confidence to share their testimonies as they grow in their understanding of the Scriptures. Salvation is available to all who are willing to receive Jesus.

What barriers must you overcome to better recognize opportunities to share Jesus with others? Identify steps you will take to overcome a barrier.

Schedule time this week to search your Bible and to pray. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you how you can network with others in your Bible-study group to share the gospel more effectively.

List questions you have that keep you from following Jesus. If you're already a follower of Jesus, list questions you had prior to making that commitment. How can you use those questions to strengthen your personal strategies for introducing someone to Jesus?



MEMORIZE

"Those who were scattered went on their way preaching the message of good news." Acts 8:4

USE THE SPACE PROVIDED TO MAKE OBSERVATIONS AND RECORD PRAYER REQUESTS DURING THE GROUP EXPERIENCE FOR THIS SESSION.

MY THOUGHTS

Record insights and questions from the group experience.

MY RESPONSE

Note specific ways you'll put into practice the truth explored this week.

MY PRAYERS

List specific prayer needs and answers to remember this week.

