

# PHILIP *the* EVANGELIST

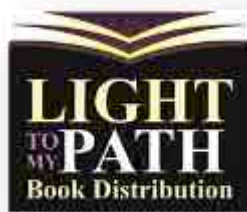
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*Lessons from the ministry  
Of Philip the Evangelist*

F. Wayne MacLeod

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Philip the Evangelist

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## PREFACE

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Not much is known about Philip the evangelist. He was a deacon in the early church of Jerusalem, but he left the area when persecution arose in the city. He had a very fruitful public ministry in Samaria, where God used him in wonderful ways to preach the gospel with great power. He followed God's call to leave Samaria and travel to the desert of Gaza to reach a single Ethiopian official for Christ. He preached in Azotus and surrounding areas, and ended up in the city of Caesarea where he raised four daughters to love and serve the Lord.

While this is all we know from Scripture about Philip, I have been struck by what this brief account of his ministry and life teaches us. There is within this short account of Philip's life, some important spiritual principles for our own ministry and service for the Lord.

Philip's life speaks to the issues of success, what the focus of ministry should be, God's timing and leading. It challenges us as we step out into new and fresh experiences, and encourages us to faithfulness in unnoticed and unappreciated ministry.

I have been challenged by the simple truths communicated through the life of Philip concerning what is important in

ministry. I trust that God will use this simple reflection of the life and ministry of Philip the evangelist to encourage many to greater service and devotion to the Lord Jesus.

F. Wayne MacLeod

# 1

## INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

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These were incredible days for the church. By incredible I do not mean easy. In fact, as we begin Acts 8 we meet Saul (who would later become known as the apostle Paul). At this point in his life, Saul had not yet met the Lord, and was on a violent campaign to destroy the church of Jesus Christ. Stephen, one of seven deacons chosen to minister in the growing church in Jerusalem, had just been stoned to death for preaching about Jesus Christ. The combination of Saul's violent campaign and the martyrdom of Stephen had a strong impact on the early Christians. Many chose to leave Jerusalem, the centre of this growing persecution. They scattered to many different regions in an attempt to escape those who sought to destroy them and the cause they represented.

While these were difficult days, there was also evidence of the powerful work of God among the believers. Philip (not to be confused with the apostle), was a deacon in the church of Jerusalem (see Acts 6). Like many others, after Stephen's death, he chose to leave Jerusalem and go to



the region of Samaria. It should be noted that the Samaritans were hated by the Jews of the day. For Philip to go into this region was quite radical. It would take the church many more years to accept the fact that salvation was also for the Gentiles. Philip seemed to be ahead of his time in this regard. He felt called to minister to the Samaritans, and God chose to bless this calling. Acts 8:4-8 describe what took place through Philip's ministry in those days:

4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. 5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. 6 And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was much joy in that city (Acts 8: 4-8).

What was taking place through the ministry of Philip was miraculous. It appears that a revival broke out in the region of Samaria. As Philip preached the gospel, the Samaritans "with one accord paid attention to what was being said." That is to say, they received the message that Philip preached about the Lord Jesus. It would appear from this that many of the Samaritans turned to the Lord Jesus as a result of the preaching ministry of Philip in those days. Notice also that the Spirit of God moved among the Samaritans not only to open their minds to the salvation of Christ but also to heal them spiritually and physically. Through the ministry of Philip in those days, many of these Samaritans were delivered from the oppression of demons. Others were healed of their physical afflictions. In fact, the work of God was so powerful that there was "much joy in

the city” (verse 8). The whole region seemed to be impacted by a powerful work of God’s Spirit.

We can only imagine the incredible joy that Philip must have been experiencing in those days. God was using him in a wonderful way. He was seeing the power of God releasing men and women from Satan’s grip. Lives were being changed and a whole city was in the grip of godly joy. This is one of those places where we could enjoy being forever. For many of us we could only dream of seeing our ministries have such an impact. In fact, the work of the Spirit through the ministry of Philip in Samaria was so powerful that when news of what was happening reached the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 8:14), they sent Peter and John to investigate what was happening.

When Peter and John saw clear evidence of God’s Spirit, they, too, began to preach throughout the villages of Samaria (Acts 8:25). There was no doubt that the work taking place in Samaria was from God.

As this powerful work of God was spreading though the region of Samaria, an angel of the Lord appeared to Philip. The angel had some instructions for him:

26 Now the angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert place. (Acts 8)

Put yourself in Philip’s place for a moment. You are in Samaria experiencing an incredible revival. You are seeing men and women coming to the Lord Jesus. You are experiencing the power of God’s Spirit move through you as these men and women are set free from the power of Satan. These are wonderful days and your heart is filled with

the same joy the whole city is experiencing. These men and women were newly converted. There was no church for them to attend. They needed to grow in their new found faith. There was much work to be done if they were to be established in their faith.

In listening to the voice of the angel that day, your mind might begin to wonder about what you were hearing. The angel is telling you that you are to leave Samaria and go to the desert. What purpose would it serve for you to go there? With a heart burdened for those who had just come to faith in Christ, Why would God ask you to leave this wonderful work to go to the desert? What would happen to these new believers? Who would take care of them if you were not there?

We have no record of Philip questioning the wisdom of God's leading. Instead, Acts 8:27 tells us that he "rose up and went." He did not know, at this point, what God's purpose was. More importantly, however, he was not blinded by "success". The fruitfulness of his ministry did not deafen his ears to God's call. His desire was to follow the Lord and to be wherever the Lord wanted him to be, even if that meant leaving the fruitfulness of Samaria to enter the barren desert of Gaza.

As Philip entered the desert, he saw an Ethiopian official travelling in his chariot. He was returning to his homeland after worshipping in Jerusalem. What was particularly interesting was that, as Philip approached, the Ethiopian was reading a portion of the Jewish Scriptures that spoke about the Lord Jesus.

When Philip saw that the official was reading from Isaiah 53, he asked him if he understood what he was reading. The Ethiopian told him that he could not understand unless

someone explained it to him. He then invited Philip to sit with him in his chariot.

That day, Philip had the privilege of sharing the Lord Jesus with the Ethiopian. He had come to Jerusalem to worship, likely as a Gentile convert to Judaism. That day, however, in his chariot, the Ethiopian official came to faith in the Lord Jesus.

As they travelled along in the chariot, they came to a place where there was water. Right there the Ethiopian asked Philip if he would baptize him as a sign of his new found faith in the Lord Jesus. They stopped the chariot by the water and Philip baptized the Ethiopian.

Acts 8:39-40 tell us that when the baptism was over, the Spirit of God carried Philip away:

39 And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

The passage does not tell us how Philip was carried away. Notice, however, for the second time, Philip was removed from his “successful” ministry and taken somewhere else. We are left to wonder what happened to the Ethiopian. Verse 39 tells us that he went on his way rejoicing and would never see Philip again. That is all we know about him.

The next time we encounter Philip is in Acts 21:8-9. The apostle Paul would stay with him on his way to Jerusalem.

8 On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. 9 he had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. (Acts 21:8-9)

Nothing more is known about Philip. He seems to disappear from the pages of Scripture at this point. He settled in Caesarea where he would raise his family of four daughters.

In the chapters that follow, I want to take a moment to reflect on what God was doing through these events in the life of Philip. My prayer is that we will be challenged to learn from him and God's work in his life.

For Consideration:

- What was happening to the church in Acts 8? What was life like for the believers living in Jerusalem in those days?
- Philip ministered to the people of Samaria. Why would this have been a challenge for the church of the day?
- What was God doing in Samaria in Acts 8? How was the movement of God among this people evident?
- Did it not make sense humanly speaking, for God to remove Philip from Samaria at this time? Explain.
- How did God lead Philip in the desert of Gaza, and what was the result? Are you at a place in your spiritual walk that God could lead you in this way?

- What happened to Philip after the baptism of the Ethiopian?
- How can "success" and human reason deafen us to the leading of God?

For Prayer:

- Acts 8 describes a time of persecution where believers were scattered. Take a moment to pray for believers around the world who are facing similar situations today.
- Thank the Lord for the way He moved in power through Philip in Acts 8. Ask the Lord to help you to be a ready instrument in His hands.
- Ask the Lord to give you the sensitivity to know when He is calling you to a ministry and when He is calling you away from it.
- Ask God to forgive you for times when you chose to ignore His leading, choosing rather to remain where you were comfortable and blessed.



## 2

# A TIME FOR EVERYTHING

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And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:39)

There is a time for everything. The writer to the book of Ecclesiastes spoke of this when he said:

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:  
A time to be born and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
a time to seek, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;  
a time to tear, and a time to sew;



a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
a time to love, and a time to hate;  
a time for war, and a time for peace. (Ecclesiastes  
3:1-8)

We see this quite clearly in the story of Philip in Acts 8. God called him to minister in Samaria for a time and then pulled him out to go to the desert of Gaza. When he baptized the Ethiopian in the desert, the Spirit of God then took him away from Gaza and led him to Caesarea. In all these events God had a purpose and a time.

Listen to what the Lord God said to Job:

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the  
earth?  
Tell me, if you have understanding.  
Who determines its measurements—surely you  
know?  
Or who stretched the line upon it?  
On what were its bases sunk,  
or who laid its cornerstone,  
when the morning stars sang together  
and all the sons of God shouted for joy?  
Or who shut in the sea with doors  
when it burst out from the womb,  
when I made clouds its garments  
and thick darkness its swaddling band,  
and prescribed limits for it  
and set bars and doors,  
and said, “Thus far shall you come and no far-  
ther,  
and here you proud waves be stayed?” (Job 38:4-  
11)

Notice that God measures the foundation of the earth and shuts the sea in with doors. He prescribes the limits for the waves of the seas saying, "Thus far shall you come and no farther and here your proud waves be stayed." God has a purpose for the waves of the sea. He limits how far they will travel. What is true for the waves of the sea is true for us and our ministries as well.

King David had a great burden to build a temple for the Lord, but God had another purpose for his life. Instead, the task of building this temple would go to David's son Solomon. Moses led the people of God for forty years in the desert, but would never enter the Promised Land himself. The task of leading God's people into the land and settling them in that land belonged to Joshua. Both David and Moses had a deep passion to see the fulfillment of their dream, but God had another purpose. To go beyond God's appointed time is to be disobedient.

In the account of Philip in Acts 8 we see that God called him to a particular task, and when he had accomplished that task he was moved to another. Like the waves of the sea, God said: "Thus far shall you come and no farther."

Faithfulness to God implies being obedient to His call and timing for all things. Faithfulness is not just about being busy doing the work of the kingdom. You can be very busy in kingdom work and not be faithful to God. Consider Philip for a moment. Imagine that Philip had ignored the call of the Lord to go to the desert of Gaza, choosing instead to persevere in the work in Samaria. He could have ministered to the Samaritans and discipled them in their faith. He may even have seen more converts to Jesus Christ, but would he have been obedient? God's time for him in Samaria was up. If he stayed longer he would have been disobedient to God's purpose for his life. He could not be

faithful if he ignored God's timing and purpose. For Philip, to be faithful to God required leaving the fruitful ministry in Samaria to go to the desert to preach to one man.

What does the story of Philip in Acts 8 teach us? It teaches us that God has a purpose and a time for each of us. He sent Philip to Samaria to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. In His time, God then removed him from Samaria and sent him to the Ethiopian official. When that work was over, the Spirit of God moved him to Caesarea. What is important is that we do what God has asks us to do for the time He has given us to do it. Philip was sensitive to the Lord in this matter. He stayed for as long as the Lord gave Him and then moved on.

Are you where God wants you to be? Is your commitment to your ministry or your location stronger than your commitment to God? Have you closed your ears to the call of God on your life because you want to see your work advance further? As one who has been in ministry for a number of years, I realize how easy it is for us to fall in love with the people and the ministries to which God calls us. I understand the burden that God gives and the sense of obligation to see that work through to the end. I also realize that I need to be ready at any moment to sacrifice my own desire in order to be obedient to God's call. Like Moses, sometimes God will call us to sacrifice the privilege of seeing those we have ministered to for forty years enter the Promised Land. Like David, sometimes God will call us to surrender the burden of building Him a temple so that someone else can have this privilege.

Philip left the revival of Samaria. He walked away from the Ethiopian official and never saw him again. He was faithful, however, because he respected God's right to use him and

to move him away when his time was up. May God give us the sensitivity of Philip to His leading and His timing.

For Consideration:

- How important is it that we consider God's timing in our ministries and personal lives?
- Have you ever been in a situation where the work of God was hindered by well-meaning servants who have stayed on too long?
- What visions did David and Moses have to sacrifice because it was not the Lord's timing or purpose?
- Is it possible for us to close our minds and hearts to the call of God because of our personal burden for the work of His kingdom?
- What is the connection between faithfulness and God's timing?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to understand His call and His timing in your life. Ask Him to enable you to know when He wants you to move on.
- Ask the Lord to give you the grace to be willing to sacrifice your personal vision for His call.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for His personal call on your life and ministry. Ask Him to help you to be faithful to Him in how you carry out that calling.



### 3

## BLINDED BY SUCCESS

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Now the angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This was a desert place. (Acts 8:26)

In our day, we value success. This is true both in the world and in the church. We give special honour to those we consider successful. A "successful" preacher will draw a crowd. We want to see big churches and large crowds of people coming to know the Lord. While all these things have their place, I have to wonder if this is really God's greatest priority.

For a few years now I have been acting as a supply preacher and fill-in pastor for a small rural church on the island where I live. On a typical Sunday we will have about 15 people in attendance (I'm guessing at this number as I never count). For the past twenty years, the ministries the Lord has called me to have been to less than twenty people at a time.

Some years ago, in one of those settings, a visitor approached me after a meeting and said, "Wayne, you need

to be speaking to thousands of people, not to small groups like this.” I thought about this for a moment, but realized that it was to these small groups the Lord had called me. Why would I leave what God had called me to do for something else?

I wonder what Philip felt when he heard the call of God in Samaria: “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza”. Acts 8:26 specifically mentions that this was a “desert place.” Philip was being called away from a “successful” and high profile ministry (news of what God was doing through him had reached the apostles in Jerusalem) to the desert. I am sure there would be many people who would question this call. For some, such a call might be seen as being beneath their qualifications and dignity as a successful minister of the gospel. Philip heard that call, however, and left the revival in Samaria to go to the desert. Along with this, he left all the attention he was getting, all the incredible experiences of God’s work he had been a part of and the sense of incredible fulfillment he knew as a useful servant of God.

The Lord’s ways are different from our ways (see Isaiah 55:8). God’s priorities are not the same as ours. There are many examples of this in the Scriptures.

In Acts 11, we read about the church in Antioch. The Lord was doing a wonderful work in Antioch in those days. In Acts 11:20-22, we read:

20 But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. 22

The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.

When Barnabas (who was involved in this work) saw the incredible work of God in Antioch, he realized that they needed help. He went to Tarsus to find Paul and asked him to come and help with the work in the city (Acts 11:25). For a whole year these two men worked in Antioch. Acts 11:24 tells us that “a great many people were added to the Lord.” In fact, verse 26 tells us that the first occurrence of the term “Christian” was in Antioch.

As this wonderful work was taking place under Paul and Barnabas, the church in Antioch gathered together to pray. As they were praying, the Spirit of God spoke to the believers present that day and said: “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2). When the church heard those words, they laid hands on these two men and with prayer and fasting sent them off.

What is important for us to notice here is that Paul and Barnabas were key leaders in this wonderful work of God in Antioch. That day, the Lord God called these two men away from a successful ministry to go on a mission trip where they would experience great struggle and persecution. Why would God take away the leaders of this revival at such a time? We do not always know the reasoning of God, but what is important for us to note is that Barnabas and Saul were willing to leave the successful ministry in Antioch for an unknown future as they followed the leading of God.

Consider the apostle Paul, whose ministry was so vital to the early church. Many of the early churches were planted by the apostle. Paul had a missionary heart. God had



called him to be the apostle to the Gentiles. It seems, however, that at the peak of his ministry, the Lord stopped him. He would spend years behind the bars of a Roman prison, unable to travel and do the missionary work he loved to do. Why would God take Paul from a successful itinerant ministry and send him to prison? While we do not have the answer to this question, it is important to note that the Lord has a time and a place for us.

The same principle applies to the life of Moses. At the age of forty, when he had the influence and position to set the people of Israel free, the Lord sent him into the desert. It was not the time for Moses to lead the people of God. Moses was in that desert for forty years before the Lord would again speak to him about delivering His people from bondage. Why didn't God use Moses at the height of his power and influence? Again, there are many possible answers, but we must recognize that God's ways are different from our ways and his timing is different from ours.

While we all would like to be part of a ministry like Philip's in Samaria, God will sometimes call us out of such ministries to serve in a more humble capacity. Our tendency is to feel that if God is blessing, then I must be in the right place. Don't be deceived by this. God was richly blessing Philip's ministry, but He also called him away from it. We can become content in the blessing and "success." This can be a dangerous place for us as it can deafen us to any other call of God on our lives.

We can become so content in "success" that we don't want to move. Our success can make us so proud that we feel it is beneath our dignity to go to a less prestigious church or a less fruitful ministry. As we watch the work of God's Spirit around us we can reason away the call of God in our lives. We can begin to feel like God needs us if this ministry

is to continue to succeed. As we bask in the success of our ministry, we can come to a point of not wanting to hear of God leading us anywhere else. Our success can blind us to any other leading of God.

Success is a wonderful thing, but it can quickly distort our perception of obedience to God's leading. Philip left the revival of Samaria to go to the desert because that is where the Lord led him. He would not stay in Samaria if God was leading him elsewhere—even if it was to the dry and barren desert.

Faithfulness and success are two different things. It is not those who are successful who are most faithful, but rather those who are willing to turn their backs on success in order to be obedient. What does Acts 8 teach us? It speaks to the dangers of success (as wonderful as it can be). Acts 8 gives us an example of a man who was willing to turn his back on a "successful ministry" in order to be obedient to the leading of God. He refused to allow his success in ministry blind him to the call of God to the desert.

Don't make success your goal and your god. There is only one God, and He reserves the right to take you from the blessed ministry of Samaria to the desert of Gaza. Don't let the dazzling lights of success keep you from hearing the call of God. Don't let success make you so proud that you are unwilling to minister in more humble ways. True faithfulness to God is not found in success but obedience. Are you ready to be obedient? May the Lord give us grace not to linger in success longer than He desires. May He give us grace to walk in complete obedience to His call on our lives no matter where that might take us.

## For Consideration:

- Why do you feel there is such an attraction to the "successful ministry"?
- Is being "successful" wrong? Explain.
- Give some examples of how God removed people from "successful" ministries and sent them elsewhere?
- How can "success" blind us to the call of God?
- How can success become a god for us? What is true success in ministry? What is the difference between how God sees success and how the world views success?
- What is faithfulness? What is the difference between faithfulness and success?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be faithful to Him no matter the cost?
- Ask the Lord to bless your ministry and make it successful.
- Ask the Lord to protect you from the temptations of "success."
- Ask God to give you a heart that will leave everything to follow Him.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for past successes. Recognize that you owe all success to Him.

## 4

### WHEN AND WHERE

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27 And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."

As we read about the ministry of Philip in Samaria and Gaza, we understand that the Lord God has a very particular plan. Consider, for example the call of God for Philip to leave Samaria and go to the desert. Philip listened to the call of God and travelled the distance required. As he was walking on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, an Ethiopian official was passing by reading a passage from the book of Isaiah.

I am struck by the incredible plan of the Lord here. Not only was the timing perfect, but Philip was the man God had chosen for this particular task. Philip was where God wanted him to be at the very moment in time God wanted him to be there. To linger in Samaria when God had called him to Gaza, even for a moment, may have meant missing

the opportunity God had given him to minister to this Ethiopian official.

I understand that God is a sovereign God who can orchestrate events to accomplish His purpose even when I am not as faithful as I should be. I do believe, however, that there are many ministry opportunities we miss because we linger too long in what God has not called us to do.

In the days of Queen Esther, the Jews were living in exile. Haman, a Persian official of the king, disliked the Jewish population and set his heart to destroy them. When Mordecai, Esther's Jewish guardian, discovered this plot to kill the Jews, he appealed to Esther for help. Listen to what he told her in Esther 4:13-14:

13 Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. 14 For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

There are two important details we need to see in these two verses.

First, notice that Mordecai believed that God could raise up anyone to help deliver His people from the evil plot of Haman. If Esther remained silent at this time, God could find someone else to accomplish His purposes for the Jews. If Esther remained silent, however, he was convinced that she and her family would suffer the consequences and perish.

Second, Mordecai believed that, in the sovereignty of God, Esther had been made queen for this very moment in time. God had put her in a place of influence to rescue her people from the evil plot of Haman to destroy them.

God had a particular purpose for Esther, and this was the time for her to stand up and accomplish that purpose. To linger at this time without doing anything would have meant the death of her family. She was God's instrument and this was the precise time for her to act.

We see a similar thing happening in the days of Joseph, as recorded in the book of Genesis. Joseph was sold into slavery and went to Egypt. There he gained the favour and respect of the king's official. He was thrown into prison at a time when the king's cupbearer and baker were also there. He interpreted their dreams for them and things came to pass exactly as he had predicted. When the Pharaoh of Egypt had a dream he could not interpret, the cupbearer remembered Joseph and told the king about him. Pharaoh asked that Joseph be brought to him to interpret his dream. When Joseph successfully interpreted this dream, Pharaoh made him second in command of the nation, under him. Under the skillful administration of Joseph, both Egypt and Israel were spared in a time a great famine.

Looking back over the events of his life, Joseph would later say to his brothers:

20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

Joseph had a clear sense of the Lord's timing and purpose in his life. He was thrown into prison at a time when two of

the king's servants needed to have their dreams interpreted. He was taken out of prison at a time when famine was about to break out in the land. He was given a position of honour in the nation when his family needed provision and protection. Joseph recognized that he was where God wanted him to be at the exact time God wanted him to be there.

In 2 Samuel 5:22-25 we read the story of how David conquered the Philistines after he became king.

22 And the Philistines came up yet again and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim. 23 And when David inquired of the Lord, he said, "You shall not go up; go around to their rear, and come against them opposite the balsam trees. 24 And when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then rouse yourself, for then the Lord has gone out before you to strike down the army of the Philistines." 25 And David did as the Lord commanded him, and struck down the Philistines from Geba to Gezer.

What particularly strikes me in this passage is how the Lord God led David. God not only told him what he was to do, but how and when he was to do it. David was to go up to conquer the Philistines, but he was to do so in a particular way. He was to go around behind them and wait until he heard the sound of marching in the balsam trees before attacking. God was very specific. David was victorious because he was obedient to God's way and God's timing. I do not expect that David would have won this victory had he refused to wait for the sound of marching in the trees as the Lord moved ahead of him into battle.

What we see in all of these illustrations is that God has a particular purpose and time for the things He does. Philip was sensitive to the leading of the Lord and found himself exactly where the Lord wanted him to be at the right time.

We are not always obedient to the Lord and sometimes linger in doubt or disobedience to His calling. Let me conclude this reflection by taking a moment to consider what happens when we linger in doubt or disobedience when God calls us to step out in faith.

### *Lost Opportunities*

When we linger longer than God intends, we may very well miss the opportunities God has given us to minister in His name. Philip could have missed meeting the Ethiopian. Esther could have missed the opportunity to rescue her people from Haman. David could have lost the battle with the Philistines.

While God is a forgiving God, lost opportunities are not something we ought to take lightly. Consider what God has to say to His prophet in Ezekiel 3:18:

18 If I say to the wicked, "you shall surely die," and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.

There was to be no hesitation for the prophet. God's wrath was coming and the people needed to be warned. There were consequences for failing to do what God called the prophet to do when He called him to do it. To fail to communicate the word of the Lord when asked to do so was to



bring judgment both on himself and those he had been called to warn.

Philip was where the Lord wanted him to be when the Lord wanted him to be there. The result was that the Ethiopian came to know the Lord Jesus as he travelled on his way home.

### *Hindered Personal Growth*

If we linger where God has not called us to be, we will miss the opportunities God has given to us to grow in fellowship and intimacy with Him. Philip experienced the power of the Lord in the desert of Gaza. He saw how God led him and opened the doors for him to minister. He experienced the work of the Spirit of God in his life as he led the Ethiopian to the Lord.

God develops our gifts and draws us closer to Himself through the things He calls us to do. As we step out in obedience, He teaches us what we need to know and stretches us in new ways. If we want to grow in our spiritual walk, we need to be people who are willing to walk in obedience. We will never experience our full potential in Christ if we linger where God has not called us to linger.

### *Hindering Growth in Others*

My first term as a missionary was on the island of Mauritius. It was not long after I arrived that the Lord showed me the work He had called me to do. The church, to which I had been called, had experienced division. I remember on one occasion how the Lord showed me a picture of a battle field with wounded soldiers scattered as far as I could see. I felt the Lord was showing me that my role was to help those wounded soldiers back on their feet. Over the course

of the next three years, the church committee and I worked and prayed for God to bring the healing necessary to the church and restore the unity and fruitfulness they had once known. After three years, it was time for me to return to Canada on furlough. The church wanted me to return to continue the work but as I sought the Lord about this, I had a sense that I had done what He had asked me to do.

Around that time the Lord brought a national pastor to the area. As the day for my departure drew near, it became more and more obvious to me that this pastor was the one God had called to take over where I had left off. I knew that he had gifts I did not have. I felt that if the church was to continue to grow, it would not do so under my ministry as I had already done what God had asked me to do. The church too understood the leading of the Lord in this matter and called the pastor to take my place.

Under the ministry of this national pastor the church grew. I knew that this would not have happened under my ministry. God's purpose was to move the work forward through this national pastor. I needed to know my limitations, and the call of God. I realize that had I remained in this ministry there may have been some blessings, but I would have hindered this national pastor from doing what God had called him to do. I would have stood in his way. For him to be all God wanted him to be and for the church to grow I needed to get out of the way. My time was up.

For Philip to achieve the purpose of God, he needed to be where God wanted him to be. If he stayed in Samaria or Gaza longer than God intended for him, he would only be getting in the way of what God really wanted to do. There is a price to pay for lingering where God does not want us to linger. There is a cost to pay for not stepping out in

God's timing to be where He wants us to be. May God give us grace to discern His leading?

For Consideration:

- Is it possible to miss God's timing and leading? What are the consequences?
- How is God's leading and perfect timing evident in the life of Joseph?
- Can we run ahead of God? Consider God's leading in the life of David in 2 Samuel 5:22-25.
- Have you ever missed opportunities God has given you by lingering where you should not have lingered?
- How is it possible to hinder the work of God in someone else's life by staying too long where we are no longer called?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for missed opportunities to minister. Ask Him to give you grace to walk in obedience to His call on your life at any moment.
- Thank the Lord that He is the sovereign God who has a perfect plan for your life. Thank Him for the privilege you have to be His servant and to minister in His name and for His time.
- Ask God to help you to be more discerning about His leading in your life. Ask Him to help you to know when He has called you to move and when He has called you to stay where you are.

## 5

### THE CENTRE OF FOCUS

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39 And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. (Acts 8:39)

One of the great temptations in ministry is for us to want to be the centre of attention. We want people to need us and depend on us. We want people to see us and appreciate our gifts and experience. Those who preach the word of God can do so to impress their listeners with their speaking skills and knowledge. We can attend meetings at church so people will think highly of us. I have been in churches where people were trained to be friendly so as to impress the newcomer with how friendly the church was. While many of these things are good in themselves, the question we want to consider here relates to the focus of our life and ministry.

When you preach to impress your listener, who is the real purpose of your message? When you focus your attention on friendliness and programmes to impress people, what is the real goal of your church? When people come to your church because they like the style of music or the format

of the worship service, what is their primary concern? While the answers to these questions are not always obvious, it is possible that the attention could be on us and not on God?

2 Chronicles 5 is the story of the dedication of the temple of Solomon. At that time, the Ark of the Covenant was brought into the temple along with the holy objects used in the worship of God. This was a wonderful time for the people of God. They were worshipping in a brand new building—one of the most incredible buildings of the day. It was filled with gold, bronze and elaborately decorated curtains and pillars. One could not enter into this building to worship without being impressed by the craftsmanship.

As the meeting unfolded, 2 Chronicles 5:6 tells us:

6 And King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who had assembled before him, were before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered.

There was such a spirit of generosity experienced that day that the priests could no longer count how many sacrifices were being made.

The music was glorious. The Levitical singers were dressed in fine linen and played cymbals, harps and lyres. One hundred and twenty priests played trumpets. 2 Chronicles 5:13 describes the music:

13 And it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, and when the song was raised the trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the Lord, "For he

is good, for his steadfast love endures forever," the house, the house of the Lord was filled with a cloud.

As music and praise to God rose up in the temple that day, the Lord responded and made His presence known in a cloud that descended on the people gathered.

Notice the result of this great cloud descending in 2 Chronicles 5:14:

14 So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.

Consider what was happening at that great worship service. God's people entered one of the most incredible buildings ever made in Israel. They were dazzled by the architecture and rich decorations on the wall. People brought more offerings than they could count. The music was so incredible that it brought the very presence of God into the building. God descended on that building and made His presence known in the form of a cloud. As the cloud descended, it hid the gold on the walls. It covered the richly ornamented pillars and curtains. The music stopped. The offering of sacrifices stopped because the priests were no longer able to perform their duties in the presence of such glory. There was silence and awe. As glorious as the building and music were, it was nothing compared to the presence of God felt and seen that day. The people stood in silence, reverence and humility before this holy presence. Thoughts about the music and the building were set aside—the centre of focus was the glory of God that had filled that place.

How easy it is for us to be focused on secondary things. These things are important, but we dare not let them take first place in our lives and ministries. The church of Ephesus in Revelation 2 is an example of this. God commends them for their hard work, their toil, their patient endurance. They could not bear those who were evil. He saw how they were able to discern truth and were not deceived by false apostles. Despite their persecution for Christ, they had not grown weary in their faith but were holding strong to the truth and the principles of His word. God commends them for these wonderful characteristics but He had something against them—they had lost their first love (Revelation 2:4).

God went on, in Revelation 2:5, to tell this faithful church in Ephesus:

5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent.

What was happening in the church of Ephesus? They had lost their centre of focus. They were faithful to truth and the principles of God's Word. They endured hardship for the truth but in the process they had moved God from the centre of their lives. Truth and Christian lifestyle became the focus and their relationship with God was pushed aside.

In the course of the history of the church, we have seen many great revivals come and go. I have often found myself wondering if the reason we do not see God's presence remain in these revivals is because people fall in love with the experience of revival and push God aside. We love what we are seeing. We love the fruit of the revival. We love those who preach the message to us, but do we

grieve the Spirit of God by worshipping the message and the experience?

In Revelation 19, an angel appeared to John with a message. When John saw this angel and heard the incredible message he fell down at his feet to worship the messenger. Listen to the response of the angel to John:

10 Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brother who hold to the testimony of Jesus, Worship God."

Have you ever found yourselves focusing on the messenger of God? We admire and look up to the one who brought us to the Lord and disciplined us. It is possible, however, to delight more in the messenger than in God. How easy it is for our focus to shift from God to a servant of God or to a set of doctrines. These become the centre of our attention. We live for them, and our relationship with God suffers.

Listen to the challenge of God to the church of Laodicea in the book of Revelation:

20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. (Revelation 3)

These are the words of God to a church. Inside that church were people called Christians who were very busy with religious activities. God was outside knocking on the door wanting to come in. God's presence was not among them. They had left Him outside. He was not the centre of their focus. Other things had taken His place.



Someone once said: "It used to be that when we were looking for a new pastor, we would ask the question: "Does the fire of the Spirit burn in his bones." Now we ask: "Where was he educated." There is something quite disturbing about this statement. It shows us that the centre of our focus has changed. We are no longer depending on God, but on people. We are no longer depending on the power of God's Spirit to change lives, but on the education and experience of our pastors.

What does all this have to do with the story of Philip in Acts 8? Simply this, God took away the individual He had used to stir up and bring many to faith in Samaria. He did not let Philip linger in the presence of the Ethiopian in the desert of Gaza. How easy it would have been for people to place their confidence in Philip, as the anointed servant of God. How much easier it seems to be to focus on those we can see than on a God we cannot see.

By removing Philip from Samaria and from the life of the Ethiopian in the desert, God was forcing these people to look to Him alone. The Ethiopian would never see Philip again. As he returned home to Ethiopia all he had was the Scriptures and his Lord. That was enough. He would not have Philip in the chariot with him on the long drive back. His conversation would have to be with his new-found Saviour. He would not return to a country where there were many believers and a good church to attend. To the best of our knowledge, there were no other believers in Ethiopia. His focus would have to be on God. If he was going to grow in his walk with God, his only option would have been to cling to the truth of the Word and to the guidance of the Spirit of God. Philip was taken out of his life.

The same is true for the work in Samaria. We have no record of Philip ever returning to Samaria. God removed the

person He had used to bring many to faith. These individuals would, no doubt, remember the ministry of Philip, but if they were to grow in their faith, they would have to look elsewhere. God took the focus away from Philip.

When we linger longer than we should, we take the focus away from God and place it on ourselves. We all want to be useful. We all want people to respect us and value our contribution. As normal as this is for us, the temptation is that we value this more than we value the glory of God. Are we willing to let God have the glory? Will we step away if, even for a moment, people begin to focus on us and not on our Saviour? Will we let our pride cause us to linger longer than necessary, taking away the glory that belongs to God?

What do we see in this story of Philip in Acts 8? We see how God uses Philip and then removes him. Philip did not linger when God called him to go. He was to do the work and move on, lest in staying longer than he needed to, the focus would shift from God to himself.

Philip would not see the results of his ministry to the Ethiopian. He would not know the full impact of his work in Samaria. He would not have people coming to him to say: "it was because of your ministry that I came to know the Lord." He would not see those he brought to the Lord again. He risked having people forget him. The impact of his ministry would continue, but Philip's name would eventually slip away from their minds. This was not important, however. What was important was that God would continue to receive the glory and that He would be the centre of their focus.

Philip willingly stepped aside when his work was completed. God would not let him take centre stage. He would

do his part and then disappear from the scene. Are you willing to do this? Will you surrender the centre of focus to God? Will you step aside so that He can receive all the applause and glory?

#### For Consideration:

- Have you ever felt the temptation to be the centre of focus in ministry? Explain.
- What happened in 2 Chronicles 5 when the Lord took centre stage? What changed in the worship service?
- Is it possible for good things to take the place of God? Consider the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2 in your answer.
- Can we worship our doctrines and our worship format? Can they take the place of God? Explain.
- Is it possible for us to be more focused on our education and experience than the work of God's Spirit? While God uses our education and experience, how important is it for us to recognize that the true source of our strength is in God?
- What needs to happen in your ministry or life for God to be the centre of focus?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for times when you have taken the glory due to him for yourself.
- Ask God to help you to make Him the centre and goal of all you do.
- Ask the Lord to show you if you are lingering longer than you should in any aspect of your ministry. Ask

Him to help you to walk fully in His plan. Pray that He would receive all the glory and that you would be content to be an instrument through which He receives that glory.



## 6

### FRESH EXPERIENCES

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A river that does not flow quickly becomes stagnant. God has a way of stretching us, and in doing so, He encourages us to grow in our trust and dependence on Him.

God's ways are not always predictable. As we look at how God led the prophets and apostles in the Scriptures we see that they never really knew what God was going to call them to do. Sometimes these men of God made plans but God changed those plans. What was important was that they be sensitive to the leading of the Lord at all times.

There is something quite unsettling for the human spirit in this uncertainty. We like to predict what is going to happen. We like to plan our days and our lives and work toward our goals. Ultimately, however, we are not in control of our destinies and our days. God alone knows the plans He has for us and will lead us accordingly.

While we are not in control of our destiny, it is comforting to know that we do have a loving God who is. Listen to what God told His people through the prophet Jeremiah:

11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. (Jeremiah 29:11)

We are in good hands.

As we look at the ministry of Philip in Samaria and Gaza and see how the Lord moved him from one place to another, we see that Philip needed to be ready to move at a moment's notice. In those days of ministry, Philip was being stretched in his faith as he learned to trust in the Lord's provision and direction for his life.

How easy it is to become comfortable in what we are doing. Have you ever met individuals who had a wonderful salvation experience but never moved beyond this experience? The apostle Paul became the man he was not because of one incident on the road to Damascus but because of his ongoing experience with God as he walked in obedience to His call.

Maybe you know Christians who have become so focused on past successes that they have never moved on. The challenge of the Word of God is for us to forget what is behind, and move forward in our pursuit of Christ. Listen to the advice of Paul in Philippians 3:12-14:

12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

What began for Paul on the road to Damascus when he came to know the Lord Jesus continued throughout his life. His conversion experience was only the beginning. God led him each day, bringing fresh experiences of His grace. Each day Paul was stretched in his faith and trust in God. His life did not turn out as he had expected. He had been a religious Jew persecuting Christians. God changed that and introduced Him to Christ. As a Christian, he was persecuted and harassed throughout his ministry. He was imprisoned and ended his life in a Roman prison. Each step of the way, however, was an opportunity to trust the Lord and experience Him in a new and fresh way.

Philip's ministry in Acts 8 was unpredictable. God used him in a powerful way to reach the masses in Samaria. He then sent him into the desert of Gaza to speak with one man and lead him to a saving knowledge of Christ. Then, once again, God removed him from that place and sent him to Caesarea where he would fade into obscurity.

Who knows what God has planned for your life or mine? He does have a plan for you. That plan involves moving forward in your walk with Him. It involves learning to trust Him more. It involves learning to walk with Him in greater faithfulness. The experiences of the past have taught us many things, but there are many more experiences to come. God leads us into areas where we are not always comfortable. The temptation for us will be to find a place where we are comfortable and pitch our tent with the intention of remaining there.

How easy it would have been for Philip to remain in Samaria where the great revival was taking place. In this place he would have felt useful and important; he would have been remembered and respected as a great man of God. There he may have been able to build his reputation



and establish a great church among the Samaritans. But this was not God's intention for him. God had other plans that involved trusting Him in new ways and in new circumstances.

It is not the intention of God that we become stagnant in our relationship with Him. There are so many things God wants to teach us. Some of those lessons are difficult and may lead us into the desert where our ministry will be not to the hundreds and thousands but to one lonely man wandering in the wilderness of life.

The questions we must ask ourselves are these: Am I willing to let God lead me into the plans He has for my life? Am I willing to leave the prosperity of Samaria to go to the desert of Gaza? Am I willing to let God lead me into fresh experiences of His grace and mercy, no matter the cost?

Philip moved as God led him. As he did, he was being stretched in his faith and in his relationship with God. He surrendered to God and willingly obeyed whatever God called him to do. Who knows where God will lead you today? He may choose to stretch you in ways you never thought possible. He may choose to use you in a ministry you never imagined. Are you open to being led by God? Are you willing to step out in trust? Will you let Him lead you into fresh experiences of His grace and enabling?

Philip's ministry was unpredictable from a human perspective. He was moved from one place to another by God, and then he simply disappeared from the spotlight. In all this, however, he was experiencing the richness of God's fellowship and enabling. God was using him, shaping him and drawing him closer through the things he experienced under His leading. May we have the attitude of Philip – ready to move as God leads, always ready to trust Him as

He leads us into new territory and fresh experiences of His enabling power.

For Consideration:

- How has God led you in your life? How was this different from what you expected?
- What lessons has God been teaching you through the way He led you?
- What fresh lessons has God been teaching you?
- What makes us comfortable with where we are in our walk with God? What keeps us from wanting to move forward?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the things He has taught you through His leading and work in your life.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for becoming too comfortable and closing your ears to His leading in your life.
- Ask the Lord to continue leading you into fresh experiences of His grace, and provision.
- Surrender yourself afresh to the Lord for Him to lead you as He pleases. Commit yourself to be willing to obey God and walk in His leading no matter where that might lead.



## OUT OF THE SPOTLIGHT

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40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. (Acts 8)

After Philip's time in Samaria and the desert of Gaza, the Spirit of God took him away and Acts 8:40 tells us that he found himself in Azotus. Azotus is the Greek name for the city of Ashdod, about 32 kilometres (20 miles) to the north of Gaza. This was in the region of the Philistines, who had historically been enemies of the people of Israel. History tells us that Ashdod was an important centre for the worship of the god Dagon, and that this city had an important highway that transported goods from Egypt to the region of Palestine. As such, it was a heavily fortified city.

We have no record of how long Philip stayed in Azotus. We do know from Acts 8:40 that he preached the gospel there and in other towns along the coast until he arrived in Caesarea. There is no record of any revival in these regions like the one in Samaria. We are simply told that Philip "preached the gospel to all the towns." We do not know if anyone accepted his message.

This was very different from what took place in Samaria and Gaza. In Samaria, there was a powerful work of God taking place. People were coming to know the Lord and great miracles were taking place. Now however, Philip's ministry seems to be very simple and ordinary. Philip seems to drop out of the picture and we read nothing more about him until Acts 21.

The next record of Philip is found in Acts 21:8-9 when he was visited by the apostle Paul:

8 On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. 9 He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.

It seems that as Philip worked his way up the coast from Gaza to Azotus he came to the town of Caesarea where he would settle and have a family. There is no record of any more revivals. There is no record of great numbers of people coming to Christ as a result of his ministry.

Paul visited him in Caesarea on his way to Jerusalem. He was still known as "Phillip the evangelist." This may be an indication that he continued in the role of preaching the gospel in the region of Caesarea. It is significant that Acts 21:9 tells us that he had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. This indicates that these daughters had a relationship with the Lord and were using the gifts God had given them for the advancement of the kingdom. Philip seems to have reached his own family with the message of the gospel and his daughters were walking with the Lord.

All indications are that Philip continued to be faithful to the Lord in the role of evangelist and father to his family of four daughters. He exercised the role of hospitality to Paul, which we can be sure was a blessing to the apostle. While he continued to walk faithfully with the Lord, Philip was no longer in the spotlight. He lived the rest of his life faithful to the Lord, but away from public view.

It appears that at this point in Philip's life, God called him to remain in the region of Caesarea as an evangelist and to raise a family to love and honour Him. Is this any less of a calling? The work in Samaria attracted the attention of the apostles in Jerusalem. The work in Caesarea was a quiet work. Raising four daughters to love and serve the Lord would not attract the attention of the masses, but it was nonetheless a very significant calling in life.

Sometimes it is easier to be faithful when serving in a very public ministry where everyone is watching. But it may be discouraging to be in a place where things are unnoticed and unappreciated. Philip was faithful in the big things but he also was faithful in the ordinary. He was willing to minister unnoticed by the church. He was willing to leave the spotlight and serve in a small corner of the harvest field because that was the call of God on his life.

Not everyone is called to a public ministry. Some are called to serve silently in the background. Some will be called to live unnoticed by anyone else. Others will see very little fruit for their efforts, despite their faithfulness. Philip is a man who proves to be faithful not only in the big things but also in the small, ordinary things.

The prophets of the Old Testament were often rejected by the people to whom they ministered. They did not have large followings of people. In fact, many were persecuted

and put to death. They served faithfully for years without seeing any results for their labours.

The apostle John wrote to a man by the name of Gaius in 2 John:

5 Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, 6 who testified to you love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. 7 For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. 8 Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

Gaius is a relatively unknown man who served as a simple elder in the church. He is commended here in 2 John 5-8 for a ministry of hospitality toward the traveling gospel preachers who moved from town to town teaching the Scriptures.

The apostle Paul mentions a list of faithful believers in Romans 16. He greets Priscilla and Aquila, who risked their lives for him (verse 3) and hosted the church in their home (verse 5). He also greets Mary who was a hard worker for her church (verse 6). Urbanus, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis were fellow workers in Christ (verse 9, 12). We know nothing about these individuals but they were very important servants in the early church and ministered faithfully.

As Jesus ministered in the region of Israel, a number of women ministered to Him. When Jesus was crucified these women were there watching what was taking place. We read in Matthew 27: 55-56:

55 There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, 56 among whom were Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

The role these women had was behind the scenes. Jesus would be the One every eye would be focused on. No one would notice them or the role they played ministering to Him in those days. It was an important role, however, and one that they had been called to.

We are not all called to be in the spotlight. In fact, many of us will be called to serve in simple, yet important ways behind the scenes. Philip was called from a very public ministry to one of relative obscurity. He accepted this and served with all his heart.

How easy it is for us to want to be in the spotlight. God, however, is looking for people who will go where He wants them to go. He is looking for people who will willingly renounce the spotlight to work in the dark corners of this world as well. He is looking for people who are willing to serve unnoticed. Are you such an individual?

In Jeremiah 45 the prophet spoke to his secretary Baruch:

2 Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, to you, O Baruch: 3 you said, "Woe is me! For the Lord has added sorrow to my pain, I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest." 4 Thus shall you say to him, Thus says the Lord: Behold, what I have built I am breaking down, and what I have planted I am plucking up—that is, the whole land. 5 And do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not,



for behold, I am bringing disaster upon all flesh, declares the Lord. But I will give you your life as a prize of war in all places to which you may go.”

Notice how Baruch lamented the fact that his life and his calling were difficult. “I am weary with my groaning, I find no rest,” he complained. Baruch wanted a more comfortable ministry. He was growing tired of the rejection and persecution. He was seeking greater things for himself. God told him, however, that this was his calling in life and he was not to seek great things in a time when God’s people were going to be destroyed.

Have you ever found yourself in the place of Baruch? Has your ministry turned out as you expected? Do the trials of ministry get you down? Do you long for greater things in life? While these issues are very real and we need to seek God about them, it is also of utmost importance that we learn to be faithful and content in what God has given us to do—whether that is something great or something small. We must do all things with faithfulness and gratitude to God.

Philip is an example of a man who proved to be faithful to the Lord God, whether in the big or small. He was faithful in the public ministry of Samaria to the masses, in the fruitful one on one ministry in the desert of Gaza but also in his quiet, unnoticed calling as an evangelist and father in Caesarea. May we prove to be faithful to whatever God calls us to do whether in the spotlight of public attention or in the quiet dark corner unnoticed by anyone but God.

For Consideration:

- What happened to Philip when he left the desert of Gaza? What was his ministry at this point in his life?
- Does God always call us to "big" things?
- Do you know people who have faithfully served the Lord behind the scenes in an unnoticed role? How important is that role?
- Why are we attracted to the spotlight? Are you willing to do whatever God calls you to do even if that role is unnoticed and unappreciated?
- What role did "little people" play in the life of the early church? What role did they play in the ministry of the Lord Jesus when He was on this earth?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for what He has called you to do. Ask Him to forgive you for not being content with what He has given you.
- Ask God to help you to accept your role and to be thankful for the privilege of serving Him in whatever capacity.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the way He has used people behind the scenes to advance His kingdom.



## **Light To My Path Book Distribution**

Light To My Path (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement. F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

To date tens of thousands of books are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books have now been translated into a number of languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

The ministry of LTMP is a faith based ministry and we trust the Lord for the resources necessary to distribute the books for the encouragement and strengthening of believers around the world. Would you pray that the Lord would open doors for the translation and further distribution of these books?

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