

WE ARE SENT

LESSONS FOR TODAY FROM THE EARLY CHURCH

Growth Group Curriculum Week 3 – September 26, 2021 – Acts 8:26-40

Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at church. Thank you for loving and caring for each other.

At the beginning of Acts 8 the great persecution against the early believers, led by Saul who eventually became known as Paul, begins. The early followers of Jesus are scattered. Philip, who we read about last week, makes his way north to Samaria and then is directed to go south to the Gaza Road. We are not sure if the older Gaza which was wiped out in 93 BC is meant or the “new” Gaza which was built further south some 35 years later.

The ‘Ethiopia’ talked about in Acts 8 is not modern-day Ethiopia and would have been located in what we today call southern Egypt and northern Sudan. This man had taken a pilgrimage to worship God, but it is not clear if he was Jewish, either by birth or conversion. He was more than likely not a Gentile because later in Acts 10 we are introduced to Cornelius who Luke tells us is the first Gentile convert. However, he had some understanding of God since he had gone to Jerusalem to worship.

The gospel message is moving out from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the ends of the earth, just like Jesus had promised in Acts 1:8.

Philip is told to go to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza and there he finds the man returning to Ethiopia. He has been to Jerusalem and is reading from the prophet Isaiah, but does not fully understand what he is reading. Notice how Philip comes alongside him and then asks him a question. “Do you understand what you are reading?” A well-placed question is often a great way to engage in meaningful conversation.

The Ethiopian man responds by inviting Philip to join him in the chariot. You can just imagine them reading the scroll together and Philip helping him to see that the passage from Isaiah 53 is pointing to Jesus. The Holy Spirit is at work and the Ethiopian sees some water and wants to get baptized as a public display of his newfound faith.

From there the gospel moves in two directions. The man from Ethiopia goes south rejoicing in the work that God has done. He takes the gospel message to Africa and begins to share the hope he has found. Philip, on the other hand is transported north, and eventually makes his way to Caesarea where he continues to share the



message of Jesus. In Acts 21 we read about Philip again as we are told that the apostle Paul stayed with him and his four daughters when Paul was making his way to Jerusalem.

Exploring the Text

Acts 8:26-40

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.” ³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,^[SEP]
so he did not open his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.^[SEP]

Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” ³⁷ Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Questions

If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.

- 1) Do you remember being baptized?
- 2) As in Vs. 26 & 29, have you ever felt moved by the Spirit to go somewhere, and then a Godly encounter occurred? In V. 30, Philip ran to the Ethiopian’s chariot. When you feel called by the Spirit, do you run to answer the call, or delay, and make excuses why you’re not equipped or it’s not a good time?
- 3) Vs. 31-34, have you ever been embarrassed to admit you don’t know/understand scripture?



- 4) When have you felt like Philip? Knowledgeable, full of faith, ready to assist others. When have you felt like the man from Ethiopia? Reading scripture, but needing help to understand, full of the spirit ready to be Baptized.
- 5) In V. 34, who is the scripture talking about? Jesus or an earthly king? Why do you think so?
- 6) In V. 37, Philip asks the Ethiopian man if he believes with all his heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, so he can be baptized. Is this important to profess before Baptism? Why, why not?
- 7) In V. 39, the Spirit took Philip away from the man from Ethiopia. Why was this necessary?
- 8) In Vs. 36-38, the Ethiopian notices water along the road. If he had not been paying attention to his surroundings and tied them together with what Philip had been explaining he would not have asked to stop and be baptized. How can we do a better job of paying attention to those around us, and our surroundings, listening for God's call?

