



Chapter 4

Preparing to Share the Faith

Acts 8:26–40

UNDERSTANDING

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DISCUSSION

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UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Acts 8:26–40

The Big Picture

Are we prepared to share the gospel with others? Are we thinking about which groups we can impact?

The last section of this Bible study focused on the foundations of evangelization—the Church, the Holy Spirit, and prayer. This chapter starts a new section that focuses on strategy. Most sessions will have a practical component where your study will strategize about evangelization on your campus.

Should we be strategic about our evangelization or just be led by the Spirit? Some find evangelistic strategies and techniques to be ungodly. But in Acts 8, we find that Philip is guided by the Holy Spirit and that he and uses strategies and preparation to share the Gospel with others.

Focus on Philip

The beginning of Acts focuses on the ministry of St. Peter. Here, the focus shifts to Philip. (Side note: This Philip is not the apostle Philip, but the Philip who is one of the first deacons in the early Church.) Acts 8:1-5 clues us in to why this is the case: After the martyrdom of St. Stephen, chronicled in Acts 6-8, “a great persecution arose against the Church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria.... Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to a city of Samaria” (Acts 8:1, 4).

On the surface, the persecution appears to be a hindrance to evangelization. And yet, it is this very persecution that furthers God’s plan outlined in Acts 1:8: “But you shall receive power when the Holy spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” The message is clear: Obstacles won’t stop God’s plan. In fact, God will use obstacles to further His plans.

St. Philip and the Eunuch

It is this situation that sets up St. Philip’s evangelistic encounter with an Ethiopian eunuch. St. Philip models several effective characteristics of an evangelist during this encounter:

1. He is open to listening to God to guide him (Acts 8:36).
2. He looks for opportunities to share the Good News (Acts 8:29-30).
3. He desires to share the Good News. Note how he runs to the eunuch (Acts 8:30).
4. He is prepared to share the Good News (Acts 8:35).

Isaiah and the Eunuch

The eunuch held a high position in the court of the Ethiopian queen. In order to hold this position, he was castrated. The eunuch comes to Jerusalem to worship at the Jewish temple. Because of his castration, he would not be allowed to worship within the temple (Deuteronomy 23:1). Wanting to worship fully but not being able to would most likely cause the eunuch to search for answers.

The eunuch reads aloud a passage from the prophet Isaiah that speaks of a figure commonly called the Suffering Servant. The passage foretells of the suffering, humiliation, and death that the Messiah would undergo (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). St. Philip interprets the passage in light of Jesus' life and death.

Just three chapters later in this same book, Isaiah 56 will foretell of a future time when eunuchs and foreigners will be able to enter into a covenant with God (Isaiah 56:3-7). It is possible that he read this section as well, or that St. Philip shared it with him. Because he was restricted from full worship under the old law, it is no surprise that the eunuch is so excited to enter into the kingdom that he asks for baptism right away (Acts 8:37)!

Application to Jesus

Jesus is asking us to reach everyone in the world. What is our plan to reach them?

Affinity Groups

The passage ends with the eunuch returning to Ethiopia. According to St. Irenaeus (180 AD), the eunuch returns to evangelize Ethiopia (*Against Heresies* 3:12.8-10).

The fact that the eunuch returns to evangelize his own countrymen brings up a great strategy for evangelization. Most of the time our evangelization will be relational—we share Jesus with those who we are in friendship with. It can be incredibly effective to find likeminded people with whom we can share the gospel. They can relate to who we are and how Jesus has influenced our lives.

In FOCUS, we use the title “affinity groups” to describe how this works. Affinity groups are groups of people who have similar interests or backgrounds. On any given campus, there are hundreds of affinity groups—for instance, those on the rowing team, those who are in a fraternity, those who are freshmen, etc.

Because of the relationships in these groups, evangelization can happen more quickly and powerfully within them. For instance, if the president of a fraternity has a life-changing experience with Jesus Christ, he can share this experience with his fraternity brothers. Because he already has a relationship with them and is similar to them, it is easier for him to share the gospel and perhaps for them to be receptive to it. It is also possible for some affinity groups to affect other affinity groups as well. There are numerous accounts from the saints (like the one here in Acts) where a key figure in a nation is converted, which causes the whole nation to convert.

Affinity Groups Exercise

To end your study, brainstorm about affinity groups on campus. After brainstorming, review these questions: Which ones are the most influential on campus? Which ones can make the most impact? How can you reach them? Is there anyone in your study that has connections to these affinity groups? All of these questions are provided in the study guide.

Application to Our Lives

What affinity group can you reach out to?

NOTES

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Acts 8:26–40

STEP 1: OPENER

Should we be strategic about our evangelization or just be led by the Spirit? Why or why not?

STEP 2: BACKDROP

Today's passage looks at the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. This passage teaches us how to prepare for sharing the Good News with others. Philip and the eunuch both demonstrate evangelization strategies that we can use in our lives today.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Acts 8:26-40. Before you read this, check out the first question.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

Exploration: Questions and Answers

1. Previously, Acts focused on the ministry of St. Peter. Now, we see a shift to St. Philip. Read Acts 8:1-5 to find out why.

2. In light of God's plan in Acts, what is ironic about the obstacles that the Church faces in Acts 8:1-5?

Answer: The persecution forces Christians to go to Judea and Samaria. In doing so, this helps to fulfill Acts 1:8: "But you shall receive power when the Holy spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

3. What does this say about God's plans?

Answer: Not only will obstacles not stop God's plan; He can use them to further it.

Read Acts 8:26-40

4. Look at Acts 8:26-35. What are some of the evangelistic characteristics that St. Philip demonstrates during this encounter?

Answer: See the passage "St. Philip and the Eunuch."

5. Which one of these characteristics do you struggle with the most?

Allow the group to discuss.

6. What could help you improve this area?

Allow the group to discuss.

7. The passage the eunuch reads in Isaiah is about the Suffering Servant, a messianic figure who would suffer and die. St. Philip interprets this passage in light of Jesus. Just three chapters later in Isaiah, there is a passage that would apply directly to the eunuch. Read Isaiah 56:3-7. Why is the eunuch so excited to be baptized?

Answer: He is excited because, if this prophesy has been fulfilled, then he is able to be in full covenant with God.

8. In this case, the eunuch is very willing to listen to St. Philip and invites him to share what the passage means. In our encounters, this might not be the case. What do we do with people who do not want to hear the gospel?

Allow the group to discuss. Possible answers include: Pray for them. Preach the gospel with our lives. Seek to act charitably towards them. Be watchful for opportunities to discuss how faith relates to their lives.

9. What happens at the end of the passage?

Answer: The eunuch is baptized and goes home rejoicing. St. Philip is caught up in a whirlwind and is taken to another town.

10. Most of us haven't seen many signs and wonders, let alone performed them like the apostles in Acts. Despite this, how do we continue to have faith that God is working in our world and working through us?

Allow the group to discuss.

11. According to St. Irenaeus (180 AD), the eunuch returns to evangelize Ethiopia. Why is it advantageous for the eunuch to evangelize his own people?

Answer: He knows them well. He has influence in that country. They can relate to his experience because they are similar to him.

12. Explain affinity groups to your group from the section "Affinity Groups". What are some affinity groups on our campus?

Answer: There are usually hundreds of affinity groups on any campus. Feel free to let your group answer this question as long as answers come to them fairly quickly.

13. What are some of the most influential affinity groups on campus? Sometimes the more influential the affinity group, the better the possibility of getting the message of Jesus out to as many people as possible.

Allow the group to discuss.

14. Which group of people has God put into your life for you to reach out to?

Allow the group to discuss.

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