

## The Sent Church, Acts 8, Sent With Curiosity, 2/13/22

We long to be an increasingly externally-focused church, a sent Church. **A church on the Move.** That's why I came as a Pastor to this church. That's why my family is in the process of making this church *our* family.

And it's the focus of missions month. Pastor Nate and I are tag teaming the sermons this month, examining four powerful stories of what it looks like to be the sent church in our community.

### Title Slide

Today we are going to look at a story of curiosity from Acts 8 and how the Holy Spirit desires to send us into our community with curiosity.

We find two strangers who, in a very short period of time, share in a life changing encounter. One man walks away changed for ever. And this may never have happened if it weren't for the other man's genuine interest in this stranger.

We will find that their mutual curiosity leads to a place of hospitality. One man is curious about a scripture he doesn't understand. The other man understands the scripture, and his ability to curiously approach (*in this case a chariot*) allows him to be invited in as a stranger. Into a new place where God moves powerfully.

**A good host** is someone who believes that their guest has something beautiful to contribute to the conversation. The German word for Hospitality is *Gast-freundschaft* literally, "guest-friendship".

In this story, we see curiosity toward God and curiosity toward another person combine to bring about a new place of hospitality, and an encounter for radical change. The setting is not a church, but a dusty desert road - yet it ends in Baptism. We will find observe that curiosity and hospitality combine to form a special place. A place where we can reach out to strangers and invite them toward a radical encounter with Jesus.

As we listen to the encounter of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch, listen for aspects of Spiritual Curiosity.

## Acts Chapter 8, beginning in verse 26:

### Philip and the Ethiopian

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,  
so he did not open his mouth.*

*33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.  
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?”

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.

Philip has recently been commissioned as a deacon. He was chosen among 7 others that were selected to serve because they were known to be *“Full of faith and full of the Spirit”*.

A newly commissioned Deacon, Philip the Evangelist, was just in Samaria and observed a great seasons of ministry...this comes on the heels of the stoning of Stephen, one of his friends in ministry...and now he is sent by an Angel of the Lord.

I know we all wish an Angel of the Lord would tell us exactly where to go. But let's look a little closer at the direction that Philip receives...it may feel a little more like your experience if you look at what is said.

What direction does Philip receive? *"Go south — toward the desert road—the old one that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."*

The city of Gaza was an old Philistine City, and it had been destroyed years ago by Alexander the Great. As a result, the road that went originally from Jerusalem to Gaza was by this time in almost complete disuse because a new road in that direction had been built.<sup>1</sup>

Philip is simply given a direction. And a road. Not a place, a road.  
Go south. To the desert. Desolate, dry, unfruitful.  
These are the complete instructions...

When we follow God into something new...this is often how it feels. The directions feel incomplete.

### **1 - Curiosity leads us into difficult and unknown places**

At times God leads us beside still waters.  
Other times he sends us down a desert road.  
Toward a place that appears unfruitful.

That makes us wonder,  
*"God - why would you have me leave such a fruitful place — to go into the completely unknown? And for one man? Why would he want me to leave the 99 for one man? That doesn't make sense."*

### ***We have a phrase in our house "do it scared"***

*Acts of Bravery don't imply that it's not scary in the moment.*

Regardless of where we are sent and no matter how dry the place appears; if we are rooted in Jesus - we remain like a tree planted by a stream in a desert. The Holy spirit dwells within us as believers. Even in a wasteland, the Spirit can pour out of us because Christ is an overflow.

***...Philip didn't question...He Started Out...***

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<sup>1</sup> RC Sproul, *Acts* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2010), 148.

Philip met a man who was entirely different. And this ends up being the reason he is sent toward the desert road.

**The Ethiopian Eunuch understood shame. His very title, Eunuch, carries the mark of shame.** It meant his manhood was likely stripped from him, for the sole purpose so that he could be put in use as a servant or slave. Some Eunuchs rose to elevated positions of authority, but their lives were permanently scarred by shame and humiliation.

This Eunuch had come to Jerusalem to worship. He was likely a Gentile who, somewhere along the line, had embraced the teachings of Judaism. He had made the long journey from Ethiopia to Jerusalem and was now returning home. Reading something he didn't understand.

***Philip, once again prompted by the Spirit - got a general direction...***

*"Go to that chariot and stay near it."*

We often don't get the whole picture all at one.

## **2 - Curiosity invites us to become an 'Alongsider'**

An **'Along-Sider'** is someone who runs alongside an **Outsider**, and takes the appropriate time to listen before speaking. We like to speak first...and listen second.

Running alongside the Chariot puts Philip in a place where he can listen.

If you imagine the scene...it's funny & strange at the same time. :)

Eventually...he overhears the book of Isaiah being read aloud, and is able to ask the question:

*"Do you understand what you're reading?"*

At this question, Philip is Invited in - *"come and sit with me"*.

**When we engage with the seekers, we must be ready to allow the relationship to be mutually meaningful. Philip didn't have to run alongside the chariot any longer...he was invited into the personal space of the Ethiopian.**

### **What is our version of this, today?**

I've been to Burkina Faso, Africa a handful of times...a little land-locked predominantly muslim French speaking country bordered by Mali and Niger. It's not the most comfortable place I've ever been sent to. But it's become one of my favorite places on earth. I felt a hospitality in the same category of Philip being invited into the chariot. We literally walked around a predominantly muslim village, and were invited into small houses..and offered drinks and snacks. And we were invited to literally open up the word and tell the stories of God.

Every time I got back from Burkina Faso I was confronted by the closed nature of New Castle County. This can be really frustrating.

### **What is it, to be invited into the chariot, here in New Castle County?**

As of the 2020 census, 570,719 people live 'near' our church.

Where do we start?

### **Philip starts with the Ethiopian's question.**

The Ethiopian was literally reading the good news as told by the Prophet Isaiah, how the messiah would come as a suffering servant. He doesn't understand it...but something deep within him relates to the words...they are the words that closely describe his own life...

Consider what entered the mind of Ethiopian Eunuch (a man who had been physically stripped of his manhood) read these words:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,  
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.

In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.  
Who can speak of his descendants?  
For his life was taken from the earth."

If anyone could relate to these words, it is the Ethiopian Eunuch. *He asks, is he talking about himself or someone else?*

**Because of his own humiliation...he was drawn to the humiliation of Christ in his suffering.**

**God brings the seeker to the tender place where they are open to hear his voice. We simply need to be nearby, in relationship, and ready to speak. That's the life of the 'Alongsider'.**

In this case, God led the Ethiopian to the exact passage that will speak to him directly, yet he lacks the understanding to connect it to the Gospel.

### **3 - Curiosity allows us to encounter people at life-changing moments of spiritual healing & new birth**

As you approach people with curiosity, keep in mind: it's God who is drawing them to himself. This is freeing, it's a weight off our shoulders. Only God can open up the ears of someone's heart.

But we play a role in that process. We are the body of Christ, his hands & feet.

Our Kingdom Mission is to **“introduce people to Jesus and help them follow Him”** - this is exactly what Philip is doing!

**Spiritual Curiosity is a humble posture that communicates - *“I don’t presume to know everything about you, but I will start by listening. I will wait patiently for the right time to speak into your life.”***

We tend to put people in a box of understanding as quickly as we can. I remember as a student at UD - By the end of that first class...after a review of the syllabus I knew if this class was going to be “easy” or “hard”. I had put that professor in my box.

Spiritual Curiosity is different, it doesn’t put people in boxes. Philip very easily could have assumed he knew all about this Ethiopian Eunuch. But in a short encounter, he displayed wisdom and patience, earning the right to be heard.

#### **4 - Curiosity culminates with the spoken truth about the Good News of Jesus.**

It results in invitation for deeper transformation. In this case, Baptism!

**Ethiopians Journey: From Confusion to Joy**

#### **Conclusion**

- **Who are you curious about?**
- **What is one practical way you can come alongside this person to engage in spiritual conversation?**
- **When will you take this step?**

Begin praying for an opportunity

#### **Closing Prayer**

God, Help us to see our neighbor with curiosity. Lead us to the difficult and unknown places, in our own neighborhoods and in our city. Help us to become alongsiders, willing to listen and wait for the opportunity to speak up on your behalf. Empower us to rise above our apathy so that we can initiate Your presence and power into the lives of those around us! In Jesus Name, Amen