

Living on Mission for Christ

Acts 8:26-40

By Andrew Ogea

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Good morning church. It sure is a blessing to bring the Word on the first Sunday of this new year. If you would, please turn in your Bibles to Acts 8:26-40 as we continue our study of the book of Acts and our theme, Focus on What Matters.

Typically, we take the time in a new year to focus on what matters most. We make our resolutions to launch new initiatives, achieve lofty goals, or revitalize our priorities that have lost some traction in the previous year. I believe our passage today is exactly what God wants us to hear to focus on what he is calling each of us to do in 2024. So let's begin by reading God's Word together:

Acts 8:26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."

Acts 8:27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian[a] 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,

Acts 8:28 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."

Acts 8:30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

Acts 8:31 "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.

Acts 8:33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."

Acts 8:34 The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”

Acts 8:35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

Acts 8:36 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?”

Acts 8:38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

Acts 8:39 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.

Acts 8:40 Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

At the beginning of this chapter, we learned that persecution broke out in Jerusalem, and Hellenistic Jews who converted to Christianity were scattered all over the region. Jesus prophesied that his disciples would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world.

So, here at the beginning of Acts 8, Jesus’s prophecy is progressing toward fulfillment as the church is scattered into Judea and Samaria. We learn of one particular church member named Phillip who goes to a city in Samaria to proclaim the Gospel. As a result, many were accepting the message of Christ and being sealed with the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

And, now here in our passage today, we find the first example of both the completion and continuation of Jesus’s prophecy. Through Phillip, the Gospel now reaches the uttermost parts of the world as he meets with this eunuch from Ethiopia.

Now, we have made the observation in previous sermons that Phillip was a deacon in the church. He wasn’t a pastor. He wasn’t a paid staff member. He was an ordinary church member.

But, he was recognized by the rest of the church as being a man of good reputation, full of the Spirit, and full of wisdom. He wasn't a formal missionary in the way we think of missionaries today - one sent by a local congregation to another location due to a recognized need for the gospel or church planting.

Phillip was just one of a number of believers in the New Testament who set an example for us to live out the Great Commission in our daily lives. And, In 2 Corinthians 5:20, the Apostle Paul, under the authority of Christ, makes it clear that we are to follow their example:

2 Cor. 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

2 Cor. 5:18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

2 Cor. 5:19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

2 Cor. 5:20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

2 Cor. 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

So, it is clear that God has called ordinary Christians to be his ambassadors, living on mission for Him. So, that brings us to a question to consider: Are you living on mission for Christ? Are you engaged or disengaged? Are you on fire for Christ or just smoldering with no spark or flame? Are you intentional and disciplined or lazy? Are you in tune or out of tune?

As these questions land, perhaps the Lord is convicting your heart that you have not been faithful in your participation in his co-mission. Perhaps you understand the role of your partnership with Christ as his ambassador, but something has just been missing.

If so, I pray this story of God using Phillip to reach the Ethiopian eunuch will encourage and reinvigorate you today for missional living. For in the story, we learn three important

applications which answer the question: How Does An Ordinary Christian Live on Mission for Christ? The first application is to love like Jesus

How Does an Ordinary Christian Live on Mission?

1. Love Like Jesus

We were introduced to the object of God's grace, a eunuch from Ethiopia. A eunuch is a castrated man, and in most cases this was something that was chosen for them, but there are some who made the choice of their own volition to serve in the courts of kings.

We know he was a Jewish convert who had made his way from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to worship. He traveled approximately 1000 miles to seek the one true God. However, according to Levitical law, a eunuch was not allowed to worship in certain parts of the temple because they were reserved only for Jewish males. So, he was considered an outsider. He didn't have full access to worship.

We also know he is a different race than Phillip. He was also of a different class as he was a higher up in the Ethiopian government. So, we can assume that he had a measure of governmental power unlike Phillip.

His role was much like the Secretary of the Treasury, which is a cabinet position in the United States government. He was in charge of the finances of their government and it appears he had access to wealth due to the fact he was riding in a chariot and had the means to purchase a scroll that he was reading.

It is clear, he was a God-fearing man, but he was not a saved man like Phillip. But, God shows his great love by going to some pretty amazing providential measures to give this man a gospel encounter.

Just a few miles into the eunuch's journey home from Jerusalem, God tells Philip to leave a revival in Samaria and travel between 50 and 75 miles to the desert road (located south of Jerusalem) to meet the eunuch even though he didn't know why he was going at first.

God orchestrating this divine encounter goes to show you how much he cares for the lost. It doesn't matter the race or social status, whether the person is powerful or weak. It doesn't matter whether the person is an outsider or outcast.

It doesn't matter if someone is the object of cultural scorn or endures the stigma associated with some issue with their body, as was the case with the eunuch. Through this passage, we can see this overwhelming sense of God's love for the lost.

So often I hear the skeptics doubting the love of God because there are many in our world perishing without ever hearing the name Jesus. But, this story is a comfort to me because I see a loving God who goes out of his way to bring the Gospel to those who are earnest in seeking after him.

Where one seeks to understand, God is faithful to send an interpreter and proclaimer of his gospel. But, have you considered the possibility that you are the one God wants to send?

You see, Jesus came to seek and save the lost. And, if you are a believer, do you know what you once were at one time? Lost! Aren't you glad God loved you enough to send someone to reach you? But, now as a believer we have the mind of Christ. So, as ordinary Christians, we join in Christ's mission to seek to save those who are lost.

Yet, some of us are reluctant missionaries like Jonah. Jonah went the other way when God told him where to go because he couldn't stand the people God told him to reach. But, we who have been loved much shouldn't find it difficult to love others who are of different religions, races, social classes, or lifestyles.

Instead, We should seek to follow the example of Phillip. Everyday we should ask God to fill us with a God-centered, Christlike love for the lost.¹ 1 John 1:19 says,

1 John 1:19 We love because he first loved us.

1 John 1:21 And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

So, an ordinary Christian, lives on mission first by loving like Jesus. Secondly, by yielding to the Spirit.

How Does an Ordinary Christian Live on Mission?

- 1. Love Like Jesus**
- 2. Yield to the Spirit**

¹Some ideas and content for this section from Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Acts*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 124.

The eunuch is on his way home, sitting in his chariot, reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet, and in verse 29, it says that:

Acts 8:29 The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

This is the second time the Spirit has told Philip to do something in our passage. He first told him to go to the desert road, while he was there awaiting further direction, the Spirit prompted him to go near the eunuch’s chariot.

The first time, the Scripture says he got up and went. The second time the Spirit gave instruction, it says he ran up to the chariot. He yielded. He obeyed. He was full of the Spirit.

Did you know that when you believe in Jesus Christ as Lord, you were given all of His Spirit in full. 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 says,

2 Cor. 1:21 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

1 Corinthians 6:17 But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

But, even though we have access to the fullness of God’s Spirit residing in our hearts, we can resist, or quench the Spirit by refusing him access to various parts of our lives.

Yet, it is clear that Phillip had made it his practice to open the doors of his life to be in tune with God’s Spirit. It’s obvious this was not his first interaction. He was already in the habit of listening for direction from the Spirit.

On Friday, my kids and I went to my parents house to help my father split firewood. When we finished in one spot, we had to roll the splitter to another area. But, the splitter was in a rut. It was extremely difficult to get it rolling out of that rut. So, we backed it out, and when we got the splitter rolling at a good speed, we were able to roll right over that rut and not get stuck again.

Some of us rarely ask the Spirit for his guidance, and we wonder why we stay in a rut. But, if we are in a habit of faithful receptivity to the Spirit, then it is much easier for him to move us where he wants us to be.

So, are you maintaining a habit of listening to the Spirit? We must if we are to live on mission for Christ. We develop the habit of consistently praying what Samuel prayed in the Old Testament: “Speak, Lord, for your is listening.” And, then when he speaks, we must yield and obey his direction.

The Spirit often speaks in practical ways. He will prompt you to make that call to encourage the person he puts on your heart. He will lead you to go visit the one who is hurting and in need of prayer. He will inspire you to do that loving act for that person, you know, the one who you never would have thought of on your own.

Now, some of you might be thinking, “How can I trust that it is the Spirit prompting me?” Well, in his book *Drumbeat of Love*, Pastor John Lloyd Ogilvie gives some questions to consider to help evaluate the authenticity of the Spirit’s prompting.

Evaluating the Authenticity of the Spirit’s Prompting

- 1. Is it consistent with Christ?**
- 2. Does it contradict his message in any way?**

He notes that he used the word *ultimate* because often we are guided to do hard things which bring temporary pain or conflict but are part of our own or another person’s growth. So, will it bring the ultimate good of all concerned?

Evaluating the Authenticity of the Spirit’s Prompting

- 3. Will it express love and bring the ultimate good of all concerned?**
- 4. Will it bring me into deeper fellowship with Christ?**

Evaluating the Authenticity of the Spirit’s Prompting

- 5. Can I do it with him beside me?**
- 6. Are my motives pure?**

Evaluating the Authenticity of the Spirit’s Prompting

- 7. Will it extend the Kingdom?**
- 8. Will I be able to look back on it, free of guilt, self-incrimination, or regret?**

But, even if you evaluate it, you still will miss opportunities. Sometimes I miss opportunities just because I over-evaluate something. We encounter these moments all of the time.

Think back for a moment ... Has the Spirit ever prompted you to do something, and you resisted because it didn't make sense or seemed too hard? If so, you are not alone. Look at what Philip was facing. He was asked to travel 50 miles to a place he had probably never been to minister to a man who was from a different country, culture, and race.

I'm not sure that I would have that kind of courage because sometimes I struggle sometimes with much smaller situations.

Just the other day, I was stopped at a red light, and I looked to my right and saw a man bawling his eyes out, gripping his steering wheel, and gnashing his teeth. In that moment, the Spirit nudged me, saying, "roll down your window and tell him Jesus loves him. Tell him you will pray for him."

But, I talked myself out of it. Maybe he's angry and he would get even more angry if I talk to him. Agh, he probably won't hear me anyway. Oh, but his window is open. Ummm. Then when I finally reached for the switch, the light turned green, and he was off.

I used to get so angry with myself when that would happen. And, then guess what would happen. I would miss the Spirit's voice again because I was too busy beating myself up over missed opportunities.

Now, I just confess it, trust in God's continual forgiveness and love, and ask him to help me respond with courage the next time. Because I am convinced that the joy and excitement of the Christian life is found in the adventure that comes when you are living on mission; when the Holy Spirit becomes the Lord of your thoughts and will, and you yield to his guidance.

How Does an Ordinary Christian Live on Mission?

- 1. Love Like Jesus**
- 2. Yield to the Spirit**
- 3. Evangelize the Lost**

Ordinary Christians live on mission by evangelizing the lost. The Apostle Paul challenged the early church to do this very thing. In Col. 4:3, he wrote,

Col. 4:3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

Col. 4:4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. 5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

God has called reached ones to reach the lost. Because we have been reached, we must now reach out. But, some of you might be thinking, I don't know how to do that. Well, there are six practical steps that we can glean from Philip's interaction with the eunuch that will help you evangelize the lost.

How do I evangelize the lost?

A. Engage in a Conversation (8:30)

The first step is to be intentional in your conversations with whomever the Spirit prompts you to reach. Look at what Philip does:

Acts 8:30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

Philip observed what the eunuch was doing and asked a question that would open up a conversation about spiritual things. So, it would be a good practice for us to use a question to help open up the conversation.

Do you have a church home? Wow, you are a really nice person, are you a Christian? What do you believe about spiritual things? Have you ever considered what happens to you when you die? Are you confident that you will go to heaven? You may say, those are strong questions. There is no way that will ever work. Try it out and see. Then the second step is to listen.

How do I evangelize the lost?

B. Listen (8:31-34)

When you ask questions, listen to what they say in response. It will help you understand their perspective or the areas where they may need help in understanding. After Philip started the conversation with, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He listened, and the eunuch replied:

Acts 8:31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Acts 8:32 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.

Acts 8:33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”

Acts 8:34 The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”

The eunuch was confused. He didn’t understand the Scripture from the Book of Isaiah of the Suffering Servant. He traveled 1000 miles seeking to worship God, but he left still wanting. He left without knowing God.

When you ask questions to engage with the lost about spiritual things, it is a guarantee that you will hear misunderstandings about Christianity. Even still, you need to listen so you can meet them where they are. Phillip met him where he was, but he didn’t just leave it there. In verse 35 it says,

Acts 8:35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

So, the third step is that we must share the Gospel.

How do I evangelize the lost?

C. Share the Gospel (8:35)

Starting from where they are, you share the good news. B.H. Carroll says the lesson here is that “from any text in the Bible, the shortest road leads to Jesus Christ.” Phillip took that very scripture which was puzzling this man, and showed him that the shortest road from that scripture leads to Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the lamb, the sheep, who did not open his mouth. It is through Jesus Christ and his humiliating death on the cross by which the judgment for our sin is taken away. There is no longer condemnation for those who have faith in Christ. If you believe in Christ Jesus, you are forgiven and redeemed by God, and reconciled to God.

But, to share the gospel means you must know how to share the gospel! You need to prepare yourself spiritually and theologically to do the work God wants you to do. Phillip was ready. Are you?

Perhaps you need to pick up this 3 Circles guide in the lobby and make a commitment to memorize it. Or, if you are new to the faith and you want to learn how to share the gospel as well as other aspects of being a disciple of Jesus, then I suggest you sign up for the new Disciple Group which starts two Wednesdays from now. We will teach you how to evangelize the lost.

Perhaps you need to join a Community Group so that you can be sharpened by other believers in your faith so that you will have more confidence to share the gospel. Just fill out the card in the seat back in front of you and check off that you want to join a small group and I will help you.

How do I evangelize the lost?

D. Tell them the Next Steps (8:36-38)

Look at how Philip leads the eunuch after he believes the gospel:

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 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.

Now, we don't have Phillip's full gospel presentation recorded, but it is clear that Philip tells the eunuch that his next step of obedience after salvation is to participate in believers' baptism. Why else would the eunuch say, “What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” And it says that Philip baptized the eunuch.

How wonderful would it be for you to lead someone to Christ this year, and our church join in the joy of celebrating their baptism. That would be incredible! So, you show them their next steps. The fifth step of evangelizing the lost as seen in this example is to trust God with the results/

How do I evangelize the lost?

E. Trust God with the Results (8:39)

Acts 8:39 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 did not get to see what became of the Ethiopian eunuch. You may not get to see the results in those you lead to Christ. Maybe you won't get to be with them through their growth as a Christian. Or, perhaps you will have the chance to help them grow from spiritual infancy to childhood, and then to spiritual adulthood.

Regardless, we trust God with the results. We just need to remain faithful to continue living on mission. And that is step six:

F. Repeat (8:40)

40 Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

He was at it again. This shows us that our work is never done. Being a disciple who makes disciples who make disciples should be our goal.

When you go to a sporting event, you have those in the crowd who watch the game, you have those on the sidelines who are preparing to get in the game, and you have those on the field who are in the game.

Which one of these describes where you are right now when it comes to living on mission for Christ? Are you in the crowd? Are you on the sidelines? Or, are you in the game?

History tells us that the eunuch, after his conversion, became a preacher of the gospel in his own country, Ethiopia. That whole country heard the gospel because the one true God prompted one man to join in God's love for the world, to yield to the Holy Spirit's guidance, and to share the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

2024 will be an incredible adventure if you do the same: love like Jesus, yield to the Spirit, and share the gospel. That is the extraordinary mission that God has given us ordinary Christians.