

Parson to Person
Acts 8:26–40 (Be Available)
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In Acts 8:26–40 we read about Philip the evangelist being used by God to call the first recorded gentile in the bible to faith in Jesus. In this story we see a Christian answer a radical call from the Lord only to find himself used in an even more radical way. Today I want to look at Philip the evangelist and talk about what he did to prepare for this incredible moment that we read about in the bible.

We first read about Philip in Acts 6. He is one of the seven men appointed by the disciples to oversee the distribution of food and goods to the poor, widowed, and orphaned in the early church. Before this we don't read about him by name. This means we don't know for certain how or when he came to follow Jesus. However, some scholars assume that he was a follower of Jesus much earlier, placing him among the disciples sent by Jesus in Luke 10. No matter when his conversion took place, we know a few things about him. He is a member of the early church (Acts. 6:2–3). This means he was a devout student of the apostles; he lived modestly and in service to the early church and ate and lived with them daily. This specific account in Acts 6 also tells us something very important about Philip. He was "of good reputation [and] full of the Holy spirit and wisdom".

The next thing we read about Philip is that he scattered with the rest of the church (minus the disciples) after the martyr of Stephen. Acts 8 tells us that he went to Samaria as an evangelist. While there he performed many signs and wonders, casting out demons and healing the sick. Many people saw what he did and believed and were baptized. One such man who followed Philip was Simon the sorcerer. His story departs from Philip's slightly but is an interesting foil to our discussion. Simon believed and was baptized but presented major failures when

Peter and John came to Samaria. Simon saw Peter and John lay hands on people and give them the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Instead of humbly accepting the gift like the others, he asked if he could pay for the gifting. Peter starkly rebuked Simon for his error and scared the new believer to near death (rightly so). When Peter and John performed a miracle in Acts 3:12, they immediately attributed the power to God and not themselves. I imagine Philip was of the same mind, but Simon was young, undisciplined, and made the error of pride and self-exaltation. This isn't to make a statement on his salvation, but it is to point out the heart of the trained and disciplined Christ follower.

After the evangelism in Samaria, Philip is called by an angel of the Lord to travel to Gaza, a desert place. Now at this point we have seen Philip in the early church making himself disciplined and available such that he is chosen as one of the seven. From there we saw him not just scattered in fear but sent by God to Samaria where he leads a thriving revival. Now after those three events, Philip is called to the middle of nowhere. Faithfully, he follows the Lord's leading and just happens to be used to minister to the first recorded gentile convert in the church age. While on the road to Gaza he is prompted by the spirit to overtake a foreign dignitary's carriage. He overhears the Ethiopian man, a eunuch, reading from Isaiah 53. He asks if he understands it, and the man invites him in to teach. After hearing the gospel, the man asks if he can be baptized and Philip obliges. Then the bible says he was "caught away" by the spirit and found in Azotus (a town between Gaza and Caesarea), and then he preached the Gospel his entire way back north to Caesarea. From there we don't read about Philip until he is visited by Paul on his way to Rome in Acts 20.

So, what can we take away from Philip the evangelist and his life? Well, like any believer his journey started with faith and so must ours. The work of God in the life of a believer must start with regeneration!

1. Believe in the saving work of Jesus on the cross for the forgiveness of your sin

Next, we saw that he was adherent to the teachings of the apostles and the lifestyle of the early church. Philip was not just a passive believer; he, like the rest of the early church, was an active student and servant among his family and brethren.

2. Commit yourself to the things of God (training)

From there we saw that he was recognized by the many for his outstanding qualities. As a believer he was seen by others as one who could handle leadership and more so had the character needed to serve the church in a more specific call.

3. Answer the Call when you are recognized and needed

After the martyring of Stephen, the entire church, including Philip, was afraid and scattered to the surrounding regions. While fleeing to Samaria, Philip took the occasion to evangelize the region. He, a Hellenistic Jew (often discriminated against), became the perfect person to minister to the Samaritans a people that were generally hated by Jews. Philip had seized the opportunity and used it for God's glory (including ministering to a pagan sorcerer).

4. Be Available to be used by God no matter the circumstance

a. Be Humble and know that the "good" you do is all of God!

Finally, we see him answer the call from the Lord to go to a random and seemingly deserted place only to see God use him yet again. This time the circumstance is even more heavenly ordained as Philip's ministry moment is handed to him on a silver platter. The Spirit uses the journey to have Philip minister to a foreign proselyte/God-fearer who is stumped by one of the most overt messianic prophecies in all the Old Testament. Philip obeyed God's "crazy" command and was used for a specific and miraculous purpose.

5. **Be Obedient to whatever God calls you to**

From Philip's example I want to encourage you to 1. Believe if you haven't already, 2. Commit yourself to spiritual disciplines, 3. Answer the call when you are asked for, 4. Be Available to be used wherever you are, and 5. Be Obedient no matter what the call is.

Ephesians 2:8–10 says: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

God gives us His divine grace by the sacrifice of His son for an express purpose: good works. As Christians we are recipients of every spiritual blessing; we have been grafted into the promises of Israel and now have an inheritance even with Christ as co-heirs (Eph. 1:3, Rom. 11:17, Rom. 8:17). We are promised everything at the moment of regeneration, and yet we are still allowed to stay in this life. This is because God has work for us to do! I love the way Paul writes about this in Ephesians—we are “His workmanship”. God is doing a work in this world, and we are that work! God has a purpose and a plan for every single Christian in this life, and we should always be ready for the call.

When an athlete decides to join a team, they must put in the time every day to train their body for the games they will play in the future. They pay attention to the coaches and do what they say because they have the keys to their success. The best athletes even look for extra opportunities to play and train even on off days or outside of practice. They do all this because they are committed to the team and to being the best they can be. As a Christian, I think we should be doing the same, and I want to encourage you in that today. God has redeemed you by the blood of His son so now we GET TO honor him with our lives!