



Opening the Scriptures

Desired Outcomes

1. To examine Philip’s encounter with an Ethiopian eunuch, who responded to the gospel and was baptized.
2. To consider how the Holy Spirit opens doors for us to tell others about our faith.
3. To commit to sharing the good news about Jesus Christ as the Spirit gives us opportunity.

Session Key Verse

[Philip] asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” [The eunuch] replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” —Acts 8:30–31

Optional Materials

- Map of Philip’s journey in Acts 8
- Photo of the Gaza area where Philip may have been
- Internet access
- *For free digital resources to enhance this lesson, go to www.warnerpress.org/life-mosaic-resources.*

Sneak Peek

By God’s direction, Philip met an Ethiopian eunuch, proclaimed the good news to him, and baptized him.

1 *Get Acquainted*



If new members are present, introduce them and then share updates and concerns for prayer.

Think about a personal trip or vacation where you experienced an unexpected opportunity or detour. Describe the experience for the rest of the group.

Have you ever had an unexpected chance to talk about Christ with someone—an opportunity that simply presented itself? If so, share about it with the others present.

What is the biggest barrier to you sharing your faith in Christ? Have you ever asked God to allow you to share the gospel with someone you just met? Are there some situations where it is easier to share Christ than others? What makes them easier? Have you had a situation where you later looked back and realized that you missed a great opportunity to share your faith? Discuss your responses to these questions.

Sharing our faith is hard at times, but the Holy Spirit will help us, if we are willing to ask for and then follow the Spirit's leading.

2 *Discover*



Read and discuss Acts 8:26–39. The commentary section can be used to generate dialogue, or for study prior to your meeting. If possible, share a map of Philip's journey in Acts 8 and a photo of the Gaza area where Philip may have been. (Such resources are available at www.warnerpress.org/life-mosaic-resources.)

Commentary

The traveler in the chariot is identified as an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the queen, in charge of the treasury (v 27). After the first introduction, he is referred to simply as “the eunuch” (vv 34, 36, 38, 39). His identity as a eunuch is more significant than his identity as an Ethiopian.

A eunuch is a man who is either castrated, especially one employed as a harem attendant or a functionary in certain Oriental courts or under the Roman emperor; or whose testes have not developed. We do not know whether the Ethiopian eunuch's condition was a



birth defect or related to his service to the queen. Regardless, the fact that he was a eunuch qualified him for his role as a court official. He would not produce heirs, and women were “safe” with him.

The narrative portrays the Ethiopian eunuch as a Jew. He made a long pilgrimage to Jerusalem to worship. On his way home, he read from the prophet Isaiah and welcomed Philip to help him interpret the passage he was reading.

The eunuch did not stop being a Jew because of his physical condition, but it would have prohibited him from being fully included. His sexual state would have defined him as “other” among Jews and also Gentiles; he would have been marginalized in both worlds.

Philip accepted the eunuch's invitation to climb up into the chariot and sit beside him for some Bible study. Before we modern readers join them, a few preliminary observations are worth noting. First, we are reading an English (or other modern language) translation of a Greek translation of a Hebrew text. The old adage “something is always lost in translation” is relevant here. Second, what a passage meant is not the same as what it means. Third, the Scriptures must be interpreted because there is more than one “correct” meaning.

The text that the eunuch had been reading, Isaiah 53:7–8, is part of a so-called servant song in Isaiah. The eunuch wondered about the identity of the one about whom Isaiah had spoken (v 34). The prophet Isaiah originally spoke of the servant not as an individual but as Israel, the corporate identity

of a people. Followers of the Way interpreted such texts in light of their understanding of Jesus Christ. Understandably, this passage was a favorite in early messianic interpretations of Jesus.

Consider the image of Philip and the eunuch, heads bent over the Isaiah text, oblivious to the chariot's frequent jolts along a wilderness road, the eunuch inquiring, Philip proclaiming the good news about Jesus. Interpreting the Scriptures is a collaborate enterprise. Perhaps this story anticipates the end of Acts, where we see Paul interpreting from the law and the prophets from morning until evening (28:23–24). Acts concludes not with a “mission accomplished” but with an ongoing mission of witnessing, proclaiming, teaching, and interpreting the scriptures (28:30–31). We too are challenged to take up this same mission.¹

Questions

- **Have you ever had an angel tell you what to do? How do you think Philip knew that it was an angel of the Lord speaking to him? In what ways does God speak to us?**
- **Did Philip have any idea what he was to do or where he was to go? How was the Holy Spirit involved in Philip's journey? Why didn't the Spirit reveal all the pertinent details “up front”?**
- **If you were Philip, what thoughts might have gone through your mind as you approached a chariot on a wilderness road? How would this have been like approaching someone to talk about faith in Christ today?**
- **How was the Holy Spirit already at work in the Ethiopian eunuch? What is a eunuch?**
- **What was the opening line Philip used to start a conversation about Christ with the eunuch? What other questions were a part of the conversation?**
- **How was God's Word a vital part of the Holy Spirit's work in helping the eunuch come to faith in Christ?**
- **The eunuch was baptized. How might baptism have entered into the conversation between Philip and the eunuch?**

1. Adapted from “Commentary on Acts 8:26–39,” accessed September 13, 2016, https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1673.



Option 1

Divide into two groups, each group working to develop several questions to ask the eunuch many years after his encounter with Philip. (There is space below to record your work.) One person should play the role of the eunuch, who is turning eighty years old. **How did the time with Philip change his life, and what does it mean now at age eighty?**



Select another person to be a television reporter who interviews the eunuch and asks him the questions. Debrief by focusing on the legacy of faith and how a long-time commitment to Christ is beneficial.

Option 2

Select a volunteer to be a skeptical critic of Christianity, portraying the role of someone who has been offended by what he or she might call “religious fanaticism.” The rest of group can use today’s text and discussion to address the skeptic’s concerns and try to develop a conversation with this person. Allow the discussion to develop for ten to fifteen minutes before moving on to debrief. **Was this a conversation or more of a monologue? What did you learn about the ways we talk about Christ?**

4 Apply



Spend five or so minutes writing out an account of your own conversion experience. If you have trouble remembering a specific time and place, then focus on how your faith in Christ became clear to you. Here is space to record your thoughts:



If you are willing, share your story with the group. When all who are willing have shared, debrief with the following questions:

- **If someone prayed with you or helped you when you made your commitment to Christ, what was that person's tone? Condemning or affirming of Christ's love? Pushy or conversational?**
- **If you came to Christ in a moment alone, what did you experience—great sorrow and regret, a feeling of overwhelming love, both, or something else?**
- **Do you think it's harder for someone to come to Christ today than it was ten years ago? twenty years ago? fifty? Why or why not?**
- **What are the reasons it can be difficult to talk with someone about Christ?**
- **Do people sometimes rely too much on their efforts and tricks to help others come to faith? Explain.**

5 Conclude



Two factors were critical in the Ethiopian eunuch coming to faith in Christ. First, he was open and seeking. Second, Philip was sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit and open to doing what the Spirit asked. When the two of them met, a life was changed.

Think of someone you know who needs to hear the good news Christ has to offer. Consider for a moment how open this person might be. Consider also how open you are you to approaching this person to share the good news.

There are some seasons in a person's life when he or she might not be particularly open or receptive to the gospel. There are also some locations and environments where noise or other distractions can make it tough to share and tough to hear. But with the Spirit's help, some patience, and some persistence, doors will open.

Close in prayer with a partner. Share any personal concerns, and seek a greater openness to the Holy Spirit so that you will be ready to share "the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:15).

Daily Bible Readings Week 8	<i>Sunday</i> Acts 8:26–39 <i>Opening the Scriptures</i>	<i>Monday</i> Acts 12:20–25 <i>The Death of Herod</i>	<i>Tuesday</i> Acts 13:1–3 <i>Barnabas and Paul Commissioned</i>
	<i>Wednesday</i> Acts 13:4–12 <i>Preaching in Cyprus</i>	<i>Thursday</i> Acts 14:1–7 <i>In Iconium</i>	<i>Friday</i> Acts 14:8–20 <i>In Lystra and Derbe</i>

Notes
