As we return to our journey through Acts, we once again focus on this young man named Philip who has become a powerful witness for Jesus Christ. Let’s stand and read Acts 8:26-40.

Let me begin this morning by asking a question, and I want you to think about it and respond. There is no judgment here, but I want to take a quick survey. How many of you know that Jesus told us to share the gospel with the whole world...to go into all the nations of the world and to make disciples? Now, how many of you here have ever personally shared the gospel with an unbeliever? How many of you wish that you had shared the gospel with an unbeliever?

I’m not asking that question to shame you or to congratulate you, I’m asking because the truth is simply this: most of us in know we have been commissioned to share the Gospel, yet most of us do not feel comfortable sharing the gospel with people. We simply would not know where to start. This morning we’re going to study a story that serves as the most beautiful example of sharing the gospel with a spiritually open person that you will ever find. There is much we can learn that might help all of us grow in our confidence regarding the great commission. So let’s look at the text and learn from Philip.

**DISCERN the CALL**

The first thing that we find in this story is that Philip is called upon by the Lord, and he is sent. Look at vss. 26-27a, “Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ This is a desert place. And he rose and went.”

What we’ve just read qualifies as a “call story.” As we’ve seen with other people in the Bible like Abraham, Moses, Jonah and Elijah, young Philip is visited by God in a powerful, direct way, with very specific instructions: “Rise and go!” Now I know most of us would likely say that we’ve never heard from an angel of the Lord before, but if you get distracted by the angel you will miss the point. Here’s the point: God directs His
people to go where He wants them to go, when he wants them to go, and the expectation is that if God says “Rise and go,” like Philip, we will rise up and go. How does Philip recognize the voice of God as communicated by the messenger of God? Prayer. Philip would have received this direction through prayer, or dreams, or visions, or a nagging conviction that would not allow him to sleep or all of the above. If you are a believer, you already know this: God calls us; God directs our steps; God arranges divine appointments specifically for us in very particular places and times so that we might share the Gospel with people who don’t know the Gospel. I think there is one thing that is common in any call story: the fulfillment of God’s purpose in our lives will demand that we rise up and go...we will not effectively share the gospel by sitting in our recliners watching football, or generally avoiding people who are far from Christ.

Notice also that God does not reveal what His plans are for Philip. God doesn’t say, “Rise up and go down to Gaza because I want you to look for an Ethiopian eunuch and share the gospel with him.” No...God simply made it clear that Philip was to leave where he was and go to the place that God had made known to him.

I’ve seen this kind of call happen several times in my own life, but I also hear these stories regularly in our own church family, several even in the past few years. Many of you might remember Larry and Mandy Powell and their five girls. They now live in Tyler, TX. But how they got to Tyler, TX is a great story! In short, they were CALLED to Tyler, TX. For months Mandy could not shake that God was calling them to sell their home and leave behind their beloved church and so many dear friends, not to mention their jobs, and move down to Tyler. I remember Larry telling me this story, and his first response to Mandy was “What? Tyler, TX? I’ve lived in Kansas City for most of my life...why would we uproot our girls and move to Tyler, TX?” Mandy simply replied, “I believe that’s what God wants us to do.” So for several months they prayed and listened, and almost daily God would provide signs and affirmation...like random encounters with physicians, waitresses, articles, and other ways that Tyler would keep popping up on their radar. So knowing no one, yet trusting God, they moved to Tyler, TX...and God has been using their family and ministering to their family in dramatic, incredible ways ever since.

We’ve also had two young families hear the call from God to leave their Southern Johnson County lives and move north into low-income, predominantly Muslim

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immigrant neighborhoods. Again, their call stories are very compelling. God is constantly calling His people to rise and go.

(And of course, there is my own call story...how God picked up our family and moved us as far away from salt water as is physically possible in the continental United States!)

In all of these call stories, God had a plan for His people, but the first part of that plan was commanding them to rise up and go. That may mean a geographical change of residence, but in many cases it probably means rising up and going for a walk in your neighborhood, or rising up and taking a walk down the hallway at work or in your school, or rising up and enlisting to serve in your church, or at the local homeless shelter or food pantry. God’s call is specific for all of us, but in order to hear God’s call, we need to be listening. God is not in doubt regarding His will for your life. We all should try asking Him what that is, and we should ask every hour of every day.

Let’s pick up the story beginning at vs. 27, “And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure.” Just a few notes here before we move on. This Ethiopian would likely have been black, so here we see the Gospel crossing racial and ethnic boundaries. Scholars agree that the ancient region of Ethiopia was likely what we now call the Sudan, just south of Egypt.

This particular Ethiopian is a eunuch who serves the Queen of Ethiopia. Now some of you are too embarrassed to ask what a eunuch is, so let me tell you. A eunuch is a man who has been castrated...his sexual anatomy has been altered...such that he no longer produces testosterone. The resulting lack of a “sex drive” would make such a man “safe” to serve in close proximity to women of high standing. In the ancient world, eunuchs would be assigned to guard the harems of Kings or to serve as bodyguards of Queens. In many cases they were placed in charge of the national treasuries because their loyalty was so highly regarded given the sacrifice they had made in becoming a eunuch, though not all eunuchs took on that condition as an act of free will.

Let’s see what else Luke has to say about the Eunuch beginning with vs. 27, “He had
come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.”

So here’s what we can assume about the Eunuch. First, this man is likely what we call a Jew of the Diaspora. The noun use of the word “diaspora” literally means “the dispersed.” Remember that when both Israel and Judah were conquered, in each instance the Jews were sent off into exile...they were “dispersed” among other nations. Even though many Jews made the pilgrimage back to the motherland when it became safe to do so, many thousands remained in countries outside of Israel, and thus became known as the Jews of the Diaspora. This Eunuch was likely born into a Jewish family in ancient Ethiopia and was a worshipper of God, thus the reason he had made the 5 month journey up to Jerusalem to worship in the Jewish temple. However, because he was a eunuch, he would have only been allowed to worship in the court of the Gentiles. So, in some respect, he is seen as a God-fearing Gentile, yet he clearly is not a full-blown Gentile given his love for God, his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and his interest in the Jewish scriptures. The fact that he has his own personal copy of the scroll of Isaiah confirms that he is quite wealthy. He could have had a copy of Isaiah written in Hebrew or Greek...both would have been available for purchase during that time period at great cost.

Returning to the story we read in vs. 29: And the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over and join this chariot.’ So Philip ran over to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.” And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”

So...after moving Philip from where he was to the place of his new assignment, God reveals His specific will for Philip to “join” the Ethiopian as he rides south on the road outside of Jerusalem. As Philip joins...walks beside...the Ethiopian, he hears the Eunuch reading the scroll of Isaiah aloud, which is how the ancients committed things to

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memory. Philip recognizes the scripture from Isaiah 53, and asks the eunuch if he understands what he’s reading. The eunuch expresses his spiritual frustration and his need for a “guide.” The word that the eunuch uses literally means “a guide for the blind,” so this high-ranking Ethiopian official reveals that he is seeking...he is spiritually open and trying to understand spiritual matters. So much so, that he invites Philip to join him on his chariot, which was very unusual to say the least.

JOIN, ASK, and LISTEN

We've already seen that the first component to sharing the gospel is discerning God’s call and direction, and to rise up and go. Now, let’s identify the next step, which is really three words according to this story: JOIN, ASK, LISTEN

First, we need to join spiritually open people and enter into the conversation they are already having. As many of you know, I’m often put in a position to share the gospel with people on airplanes. Probably the best way to start a spiritual conversation on an airplane is to ask somebody what they are reading. If they are not reading anything, I might ask them where they are going, what they do for a living, or if they like the Royals! When you engage people in the area of their interest, you JOIN them where they are, and that builds a level of trust and some common ground that is non-threatening. It also serves as a connecting point that may lead into a spiritual conversation. It’s usually in the joining people phase that we begin to discern if the person that we are talking to is spiritually open or not.

After establishing some common ground by joining that person where he/she is, the next step is to simply ask a good question or two. Most people actually like to talk about themselves and what they believe is true. If you ask good questions, people will reveal to you whether they are spiritually open or not.

Of course if you are going to ask a question, we owe it to the person to LISTEN very carefully to how they answer the question and what questions they are asking. Some people will make it clear by their answer that this is the end of the road...they have no interest in you “joining” them any further on their journey. However, some people, like the Ethiopian here in Acts 8, will all but say, “I need help...I feel lost, frustrated,

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confused...I need a guide.” Spiritually open people will make such admissions and will likely invite further conversation.

Let me hit the pause and make sure I’m being clear: I truly believe that God calls us to share the gospel with SPIRITUALLY OPEN PEOPLE. That’s not to say that pastors and evangelists are not tasked to share the gospel with spiritually closed people...of course my job and that of the evangelist is to share the gospel with ALL people. However, Philip is not an apostle, he is not a priest, he is not a vocational minister or evangelist...Philip is a lay person, a follower of Jesus, and I think it is safe to say that his life serves as a model for every Christian. And to that end, I believe God will call you...all of you as lay people and followers of Jesus...to engage spiritually open people that he has arranged for you to meet. Remember that Jesus sent his disciples ahead into towns and told them to “find the person of peace.” The person of peace is a soul that God has prepared in advance to hear the gospel...it is a person who is spiritually open. If you join a person, ask questions, and listen attentively...and that person is spiritually closed and unavailable, MOVE ON! I think many of us have made an effort once or twice to share the gospel with people who were spiritually closed, and we got discouraged. I can totally relate with that discouragement. However, Jesus said that spiritually closed people will have to deal with God on the day of judgment, but as disciples, we should shake the dust off our feet from that town and move on. That may sound a bit harsh, but it is also very pragmatic. If a person is spiritually closed, best to move on and look for the spiritually open person that God has placed on your path.

OK...running out of time here...let’s return to the story beginning with vs. 35, “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.”

USE THE SCRIPTURES
Two final components of sharing the Gospel are found here in vs. 35. First, engage people with the scriptures. Listen, there is no substitute for people actually reading the Bible, and rest assured, most people have NO IDEA what the Bible says. Most people have a very poor opinion of the Bible based on what they’ve heard from their college professors or YouTube videos or something they read on Facebook, but most people have very little understanding of what the Bible says or why that’s important. Philip

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wisely guides the discussion beginning with the scripture that the eunuch is already wrestling with.

Now, do you have to be a biblical scholar to engage spiritually open people? No, but it helps to HAVE a Bible! It helps if you understand the basic story of the Bible, but listen: there is no better method of sharing the gospel than inviting people to actually READ the Bible WITH YOU! We know that a simple Discovery Group methodology is amazingly effective. Which is to say that we read the Bible together and ask good questions...we don’t need to teach, we don’t need to know all the answers...but whatever wisdom or answers we do need, the Holy Spirit will provide. I love how Luke says, “Then Philip opened his mouth...” I know what he’s referring to here. There comes a moment where we simply open our mouths and trust that the Holy Spirit will give us the words. If no words come, shut your mouth! Really! If no words come, it’s time to listen a little more and stop talking. But when the Holy Spirit wants to speak through us, as Jesus promised, we can simply open our mouths and trust that God will provide the words that we need.

POINT PEOPLE TO JESUS
The last and so critically important component is this: point people to Jesus. I suspect that a lot of us, in our efforts to win people over, will burn up a lot of time trying to debate the existence of God, or the age of the earth, or the Bible’s reliability, etc. But notice that Philip works from the scripture to tell the eunuch “the good news about Jesus.” You know what? Most people are attracted to Jesus even if they hate religion. Most people feel far more comfortable talking about Jesus than they do talking about the Bible or other issues. Steer the conversation back to Jesus, and ask the singular greatest question that Jesus asked of His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” When people hear the news that Jesus died in their place for their forgiveness, so that they might have hope and inherit heaven, that’s when we’ve done our job. Don’t burn up your precious time debating ancillary issues...lead people to Jesus.

Let’s look at what happens next: And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being

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baptized?” And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

I know this story sounds like all this happened in a matter of hours, but remember that the journey from Jerusalem to ancient Ethiopia was a 5 month journey. We can’t know how long Philip traveled with the eunuch before this baptism took place, but clearly the eunuch becomes convicted about Jesus and immediately desires to be baptized. The sense of urgency communicated by the eunuch in this story reminds me of many people I’ve known who have come to a conviction about Jesus and shortly after have a tremendous urgency to be baptized. Why? Because when we repent and receive Jesus as our Savior and our Lord, we have a new identity, and baptism makes clear to the watching world that we are not who we once were. We are new creations; we are redeemed, adopted, grafted in...we are citizens of the Kingdom of God...and we are brothers and sisters with the church of Jesus Christ throughout the world. It’s a pretty big deal, amen!

OK, let’s see how this story ends: And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

The immediate picture here is that Philip literally disappears by the power of the Holy Spirit and is transferred to Azotus following the baptism of the eunuch. That’s hard for us to imagine, but remember that on the road to Emmaus, when the two disciples break bread with Jesus, He immediately disappears from their sight, yet they are full of joy and run back to Jerusalem. Again, what Jesus did, so will the disciples of Jesus do. As Jesus joined spiritually open and confused people on the road, so will Jesus followers do the same. As Jesus opened up the scriptures and helped make sense of history and the deepest spiritual truths, so will followers of Jesus do for others. And to some extent, we will also discover that our physical presence with new believers and those we have discipled should become less necessary as faith takes root in their hearts. The eunuch continues to rejoice in his relationship with Jesus, even though his relationship with Philip has come to an end.

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It’s important for us to remember that people knowing Jesus and trusting Jesus is even more important than people knowing us and trusting us. We are instruments of God’s peace, but we are not God’s peace. People need Jesus more than they need us.

I hope you will take this incredible story of Philip and the eunuch to heart. Discern God’s call, rise up and go, join-ask-listen, engage the spiritually open person with the Word of God and point them to Jesus. This is our assignment as believers...all of us. I hope you will leave here this morning believing that God has and will continue to place people on your path who are spiritually open, and it will be your assignment to share the gospel with them. Pray, trust God, rise up and go!

Let’s close in prayer.