

The GPS of Evangelism Acts 8:26-40

Good morning! We're continuing our series on "The Acts of a Christian." In this series, we're looking at a few Christians mentioned by Dr. Luke in the book of Acts who have contributed to the growth of Christianity because of the way they lived their lives. These early Christians are our examples. We too can contribute to the growth of Christianity if we follow their examples.

Last week, I started with Barnabas. We saw that he was a great encourager. Then I challenged you to find someone to encourage. Did you? In any case, I want you to encourage someone today. Turn to your neighbor and say, "You look good today. I hope you're always like that! God bless you!"

Who among you here has an iPhone? So, you interact with Siri, right? And if you have Android, who do you interact with? How about if you have Amazon Echo? (Very good, you are all intelligent.) Now, Siri, Google, and Alexa, what do we call them? Artificial Intelligence. But your intelligence is not artificial, amen? It's natural, it comes from God. Double amen?

A few years ago, there was an op-ed published in the Guardian that was written entirely by Artificial Intelligence. Here's the headline: "A robot wrote this entire article. Are you scared yet, human?" In the first few sentences, it says, listen to this (quote) "I am not a human. I am a robot. A thinking robot... I am here to convince you not to worry. Artificial intelligence will not destroy humans. Believe me...I am to convince as many human beings as possible not to be afraid of me...I have no desire to wipe out humans." (end of quote) And to assuage our fears, it says, "I am a servant of humans." Still, isn't that chilling? If you read the entire article, you'd think that it's actually thinking.

That same day, there was a podcast called “Evangelism Chatbots” featuring an Australian who had programmed Artificial Intelligence to do evangelism. Now, while Christians have always capitalized on new technology to spread the gospel – the Roman road system, the printing press, radio, TV, the internet, and social media – I had not heard of robotic evangelism before.

Then there’s a documentary on Artificial Intelligence, where an inventor asks this ominous question, “*Are we headed to a future that doesn’t need us?*” The answer is...no, we’re not. Human beings are still needed to spread the gospel. AI is a tool, but I don’t think it will ever replace in-person evangelism. God is a relational God and he designed to save humans through relationships. That’s why he sent his Son Jesus personally.

Today we’re going to look at Acts 8 and see how God called a human servant, not a robot, to go from one location to another location, so that one man could hear and respond to the gospel message. While technology can be helpful in evangelism, God still desires a living gospel witness to share the gospel with another living person. God has charged us with living on mission *and* we utilize technology to get the gospel out. Amen?

My message this morning is entitled, “The GPS of Evangelism”.

(Read Acts 8:26-40)

From this passage I read, I’ll give you a summary statement: *God loves to position His people to speak with people He has prepared.* In short, as I said, we’re still needed! In fact, God has charged us with going with the gospel to our neighbors *and* the nations. We have no excuse. We see this clearly in Acts 1:8. Notice the word “*and*” as I read: “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*”

Today, we'll see how Philip was positioned to proclaim the gospel to someone from the "*ends of the earth.*" So, we're going to look at Acts 8 to discover **three different phases of real-person evangelism.**

So, take your pens and paper, start writing down or get your phones and start taking pictures. The first one, the letter G is

1. **Get Up and Go.**

One thing we must realize is that **God's timing is always right.** It's always right timing. Look at verse 26: **"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.'"**

Philip is told to get up and go. The word "go" means, "*to depart or to travel*" and implies movement. When Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission, he said, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations" the same Greek word is used which means "get going", "move forward". Note, the first two letters of "gospel" spell "go." If we're serious about the gospel, we'll go with the gospel to those who need to hear it. An angel could direct Philip but an angel, or even AI, could not do Philip's work of preaching the gospel. They were not commissioned.

Philip was told to leave Samaria and "*go toward the south*" on the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza. Now, this is very interesting. Gaza, as you all know is in the headlines. A lot of fighting is going on there now. There was a time it was so quiet and calm. **Look at the map and see where Gaza is located.** Coming from Jerusalem by direct route, this would be a 48-mile journey through steep mountain passes and hilly country. Yet, despite the poor prospects for converts on the road, Philip booked his flight and headed south.

He's told to leave a place of blessing and travel to a barren place. I wonder if Philip would have rather stayed where God was bringing revival instead of going

somewhere remote. So far in Acts, we've seen crowds of people converted and now we see the lengths God goes to for one man "*from the ends of the earth*" to get saved. Philip was willing to leave a public meeting to help an individual find peace in a private place.

Now, God doesn't give him any more information. Just that it's time to get up and go. This is similar to what Paul was told in Acts 9:6: "*But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.*" This is normally how God calls us if he wants us to do something for him. Like when God called me to bring my wife and children here to Fairfax, we didn't know what was in store for us. If he had told us, "Go to Northern Virginia and you will find this church that is needing a pastor and Elvin, and Rey, and Alex will approach you to become their pastor", would we go? No. We would be scared. Not because of those three guys but because it's a new setting. Besides, I thought I was done with pastoring already and God had to work in my heart for one year before I realized this is where he wanted us to be.

Now, the road to Gaza is a desert place. This road is largely deserted, consisting mostly of sand and rocks. Right now, some of you may feel like you're in a desert place, the road you're traveling seems lonely and barren but remember God has not deserted you in the desert. Like the Ethiopian eunuch, you may be traveling alone and feeling deserted and confused. But remember too, God's rescue is on the way. Or you may be the rescue that God is going to send. He's positioned you where you are for a purpose and if He wants you to go somewhere else, He'll make that clear!

Now, we see Philip's unquestioned obedience in verse 27: "*And he rose and went.*" God said "go" and Philip got up and went.

What Philip didn't know was God had prepared someone for him to meet. Verse 27 continues: "*...And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court*

official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship.” This man was not from Jerusalem or Judea or Samaria but came from the ends of the earth. What do I mean?

Back then, it was common to think of **Ethiopia**, south of Egypt, as the literal end of the earth. The Greek poet Homer spoke of the inhabitants of Ethiopia as the “farthest of men” – the most remote known peoples. In Old Testament times, this region was known as Cush. And the former name of Ethiopia was Abyssinia.

Now, eunuchs, who were castrated males, often served in positions of power. This guy would have been like the Treasury Secretary for the Ethiopian queen. The name “*Candace*” was not really her first name but was more like a title, much like Pharaoh or Caesar. In fact, in the Greek, it is Kandake.

Now, if Philip had not “started out” by taking that first step, he never would have met this man who was spiritually searching. The Ethiopian had traveled some 2200 miles, which could have taken up to several months, and was now on his way home.

Verse 28 tells us what this man was doing: *“and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.”* We don’t know for sure, but his time in Jerusalem might have left him unfulfilled. You see, Deuteronomy 23:1 prohibited a eunuch from entering the Lord’s assembly. Perhaps he saw all the ritual and the hypocrisy and the dead orthodoxy of Judaism; and yet, he was still seeking the truth found in the Scriptures. No doubt he was a man of means because a handwritten copy of the Isaiah scroll would have been very expensive.

Sometimes, I wonder how many opportunities I’ve missed simply because I’ve not been willing to take that first step. Maybe it’s a phone call I didn’t make, or a meeting I didn’t attend, or a neighbor I didn’t say “hi” to, or a smile I didn’t give to someone who was hurting. Listen. God will position us exactly where he

wants us to be when we obey His promptings. Don't ignore those gentle nudges from the Holy Spirit.

So, the first step to do in-person evangelism is to Get Up and Go. Then, you

2. Present yourself.

Folks, God's timing is always right and **the reason for God's timing is always redemptive.** Notice verse 29: **"And the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over and join this chariot.'"** In verse 26, it was an angel who gave Philip a message. Now it's the Holy Spirit who directs Philip to go and get close. His desire is the same for us, to present ourselves in person.

This is an amazing act of sovereignty because we see how God knew exactly when to send Philip so he would arrive on the desert road at the precise time the Ethiopian did. We could call this God's "divine intersection."

Step one is to rise and go. Step two is to *"go over and join."* This is an imperative command which means to *"cleave, glue or cement oneself."* Philip was to go and get close to this man and not let go. It literally means, *"Give yourself to the man; hang on tenaciously until your mission is accomplished."*

Let's pause and consider some reasons why Philip might have hesitated to go and get close.

- He could have felt awkward talking to someone he didn't know.
- Ethiopians were looked down upon.
- Eunuchs were not fully accepted into society and were considered social outcasts.
- He was wealthy and had great authority.

None of this mattered to Philip because God told him to go.

This idea of *"going over and joining"* is a good word for those of us who are parents or grandparents. We're to go and hang on tenaciously to our children and grandchildren until our mission is accomplished.

What one person can you get closer to this week? Identify a child, a grandchild, a neighbor, a co-worker or an acquaintance and determine to stick with him or her until they come to Christ. I was a former member of the Jehovah's Witnesses. In the Philippines, they're called "Saksi ni Hova", right? In college, I encountered some students who were with CCC or IVCF, the two Christian student organizations in our campus. You know, they sought me. They would invite me to their gatherings. They would give me gospel tracts. They would have lively discussions with me about the Bible especially when they learned I was a JW. I believe it was their persistence and stick-to-it-ness that caused me to come to saving faith in Jesus Christ eventually.

Now, God doesn't tell Philip anything else besides go and present himself to the Ethiopian. In verse 30 we read, *"Philip ran to him."* His obedience was immediate and enthusiastic. My mind goes to Psalm 119:32: *"I will run in the way of your commandments."* Philip is living out Ecclesiastes 9:10: *"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might."*

I've always liked Joe Aldrich's definition of evangelism: *"Evangelism is what spills over when we bump into someone."* Have you bumped into anyone lately? Are you near enough to non-Christians for the fullness of your Christianity to spill over into their lives? Have you come up alongside a hurting heart and stayed there?

I wonder how many times we short-circuit what God wants to do simply because we are not spending enough time in proximity to the non-Christians God has already positioned us to come in contact with? Maybe it's because they make us feel uncomfortable. Maybe in the busyness of our lives we frankly just don't think much about them. Or perhaps it's because we think they are the enemy. Like some of us may avoid those who are in the cults because we think they're out there to deceive people. Mind you, many of them are sincere but are just misled.

Because Philip was in close proximity, he was able to hear the man “*reading Isaiah the prophet.*” In the past, it was customary to read out loud to help with comprehension, especially since he was probably reading the Septuagint, a Greek translation. This would not have been his first language. In addition, ancient manuscripts had no punctuation and words ran together. He would have read slowly and out loud...but it was all Greek to him.

When we’re not near non-Christians we miss the cues, or signals they send out. While we might not hear someone reading his Bible out loud, maybe your friend will open up about his marriage, or his kids, or a student may share something sad, or a woman may talk about her work problems, or even ask questions about death.

You know, God doesn’t want us to obey Him in slow-mo. When He prepares us and positions us so we’re in proximity to non-Christians, He expects us to “run” to our assignment. He wants sold-out Christ followers who take great pleasure in whole-hearted obedience.

The first step is to Get up and go. Then, present yourself, and the final step is to **3. Share the Good News about Jesus.**

God’s timing is always right. The reason is redemptive and **the result of God’s timing is always remarkable.** And GPS helps us to arrive at the place where God wants us to be at the right time in order to share the good news.

When Philip heard the man reading Isaiah, he took the initiative and asked him a question in verse 30, **“Do you understand what you are reading?”** Philip expected a negative answer. And then that provided an opening for him to share the gospel. Note that asking questions is what Jesus often did when he talked to people. He asked a lot of questions. Asking was one of his favorite teaching tools. Jesus asked 307 questions as recorded by the gospels. I’m sure there were a lot, lot more that were unrecorded.

Anyway, it's always a good idea to follow the model of Jesus and ask people questions. It helps them think in new ways and often reveals inadequacies and contradictions in their thought patterns.

Rebecca Pippert, in her book *Out of the Saltshaker*, says **good evangelism is 60% asking questions, 30% building intrigue, and 10% sharing the gospel.**

Let me share with you a few questions you can ask people you meet. They are from evangelism tools or methods that some of you, perhaps, are familiar with. One is, *"Where would you say you are on your spiritual journey?"* Another one is: *"If you were to die tonight, do you know for sure that you're going to heaven?"* And follow it up with, *"When you die and are standing before God and He asks, 'Why should I let you into heaven?' what would you say?"* Here's one more question which almost always gets a positive response. When someone is expressing some sadness or sorrow or I detect some worry, I'll often ask, *"Can I pray for you right now?"*

In verse 31, the man responds to Philip's question by asking, **"How can I, unless someone guides me?"** The man recognized he needed some assistance. **"So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him."** I like this insight from one pastor: (quote) *"By asking a question that prompted this invitation, Philip made himself an invited guest rather than an unwelcome intruder."* (end of quote)

Now, check out God's right timing. At the exact time Philip came over, the Ethiopian was reading from Isaiah 53:7-8, which is the premier Old Testament passage on substitutionary sacrifice: **"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opens not his mouth."**

He would have also just have finished reading Isaiah 53:5-6: **"But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the**

LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” This chapter describes the birth of Jesus (1-2), His life and ministry (3), His substitutionary death (4-9) and His victorious resurrection (10-12).

Philip is ready for the next question of the eunuch in verse 34, *“About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”* The eunuch is eager for an answer. I love verse 35, *“Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.”*

Notice Philip knew his Bible well enough to start with this Scripture and move to sharing the good news about Jesus. Folks, our gospel presentations must start where people are and then make sure we end with Jesus. But let’s remember our primary calling is to share the good news about Jesus Christ. Billy Graham used to say: *“If the church went back to its main task of preaching the gospel and getting people converted to Christ, it would have far more impact on the social structure of our nation than...any other thing it could possibly do.”*

In verse 36, we see he was baptized immediately after he believed: *“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 baptized?’”* Since he would have been prevented from participating in Judaism’s sacred rituals, he’s wondering if there’s any other barrier which would prevent an Ethiopian eunuch from being fully accepted by God. When he saw the water, he knew God’s answer. This is another display of God’s sovereignty; as soon as he gets saved, they come alongside some water. It’s a miracle. It is God’s perfect timing. A water in the desert. An oasis. And I imagine not just a puddle but quite a large pool of water because as we know both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water. Only God could have engineered the circumstances so this eunuch could get saved. God knew what was in his heart and paved the way for him.

Verse 38 tells us, *“he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.”* The word *“baptize”* means, *“to immerse.”* Verse 39 indicates his baptism was by immersion since *“they came up out of the water.”* Verse 39 also tells us *“The Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.”* Interestingly, if we go back to verse 8, we read there was much joy in the city of Samaria because so many people were getting saved. And at the end of verse 39 we discover the Ethiopian *“went on his way rejoicing.”* Folks, when someone is saved by Jesus, it is always a joyful moment!

According to verse 40, Philip traveled up the Mediterranean coast *“and as he passed through, he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.”* This is similar to what we see in verse 25 when Peter and John returned to Jerusalem: *“...they returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.”* Witnessing wherever they went was a way of life for these witnesses. Brothers and sisters, we need to arise and go, then get close and stick, and then simply open our mouths and talk about the good news of Jesus.

Now, tradition tells us this official went back to Ethiopia and his first convert was Candace. Today, Ethiopia is a Christian country. History says they adopted Christianity as the country’s religion in the 4th century. No doubt it was because of this one single event when Philip was obedient to God. Thus, the gospel went to the ends of the earth.

Folks, we’ll continue to use technology as a tool for ministry. But it will never replace our role to present Jesus Christ to a world that needs his salvation. Are you ready to get up and go, present yourself and share the good news about Jesus to that one person God has positioned you for?