

The Question

“Do you understand what you’re reading?” That’s the question Philip (a follower of Jesus) asked a wealthy foreign dignitary on a dusty desert road. Maybe you’ve tried to read the Bible and it just doesn’t make sense to you. Maybe you’ve found in it something incredibly appealing but you’re still trying to grasp what it means for your life. This is the story of God meeting us right where we are – questions and all.

1. The Pursuit 2. The Question 3. The Pursuit *Continues*

1. The Pursuit: a far-off person in a far-off place (Acts 8:26-29)

Remember what the book of Acts is = the acts of Jesus through his first followers. The Gospel of Jesus is crushing cultural barriers and man-made obstacles. Here, Philip is being sent as an extension of God’s heart and clear expression of God’s missionary strategy to a desolate place, a desert road. I’m sure he had a lot of questions rattling around in his head, wondering what was ahead / in store – but he goes anyway.

After all the amazing things God had done in Samaria we might think Philip should have settled down and built a large, happening church. God had other plans for Philip. God pulls Philip away from the masses and asks him to go to a “desert place.” Mission Impossible – destination given; details left out.

Ever feel the Lord prompting you to talk with someone or go somewhere and you don’t know why or what it will lead to? How it will all unfold?

Listening to God’s call without knowing the details requires faith.

Faith is all about trust in the character of the one who asks you to do something. Even when what he asks doesn’t *seem* to make sense!

Obedience requires trusting him with the details.

The Spirit said “go” - Philip knew by now God’s missionary heart / strategy: God pursues by sending.

God the Father sent God the Son. God the Son sent God the Spirit.

Now The Son and Spirit send Jesus’ followers!

Short bits of info come at us all day – we keep managing the noise and the preoccupation is paralyzing us. It takes discipline to listen to The Spirit of God.

*Valerie and I were enjoying our dinner one night. She was telling me all about her day and then she asks, “Daryn are you listening to me?” came out in slow motion. I heard, but wasn’t listening. Philip is listening *and is sent* - has no idea what’s ahead - who he would meet – ends up meeting an Ethiopian dignitary.

Ethiopia was a dangerous and difficult journey from Jerusalem. One of the most remote places of the world at that time. Considered a “God-fearer”.

= seeking answers, longed for truth. He found in the Hebrew Scriptures something that drew him in. Maybe you can relate.

He was a court official of *the Kandake* (Candace - not a personal name), queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of *all* the treasury. A man of importance and wealth.

He was a eunuch.

Most likely made a eunuch (emasculated) because of his service to the queen.

According to Judaism a eunuch was in a constant state of ritual impurity; forbidden to enter the Temple area.

= A Gentile, from an extremely distant land, considered an outcast – due to impurity. A more foreign person could hardly be imagined!

His “foreignness” (in every way) is being emphasized. He’s “far-off”.

“Why is *this* story in Acts?”

Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and *now* the Gospel is finding its way to *the ends of the earth!* God is bringing the “Far-off” NEAR! Eph 2:11-13; 19

V28 “*seated in his chariot...reading the prophet Isaiah.*” God had *sent* Isaiah before he *sent* Philip.

What was going on in Philip’s mind? Whatever it was, it wasn’t long until the Spirit instructed him to “*Go over and join this chariot.*” Philip didn’t know what he would hear or see. He obeys the Spirit’s leading yet again.

2. The Question: do you understand what you’re reading? (Acts 8:30-35)

Philip *ran*. I love the picture. No hesitation.

In that day it was common to read out loud and Philip heard, of all things, the prophet Isaiah being read. SO he asked the question, “*Do you understand what you are reading?*”

If we ask people questions we’re making ourselves vulnerable – we might not have the answers! We’re also giving them the opportunity to be open and honest!

Let me turn this around for a minute – do *we* understand what *we’re* reading? Valerie and I were talking about this passage and she said, “*Our communion with God isn’t just for us – it’s for others as well!*” That’s right!

The more familiar you are with the Word of God the easier it will be to speak what it says! Philip had studied, come to understand what the Scriptures had to say - how they pointed to Jesus BUT it was never just for himself!

Philip asked a question and the Ethiopian responded in a way that displayed great humility – real desire *and* need for instruction.

God was already at work in this man’s heart.

The Scriptures were speaking to him but he didn’t understand.

Maybe you’ve been reading the Bible and your stuck. You know it’s important but you’re struggling to see how it all fits together.

How many of us have been in that place?! Having read something that sounds beautiful and important but not know what it means, we need help!

Maybe you’ve become so frustrated with it you’ve stopped reading.

My prayer has been for LCSP to be a place to bring honest questions – a place to wrestle with what God’s Word is saying and calling us to!

A community humbled by grace – desirous to come alongside each other as we wrestle with what we see in God’s Word! One to one’s, 2-3’s.

God meets us right where we are – in our questions, doubts and fears.

V31 Like a gift on Christmas Day! We're talking red carpet rolled out for Philip!
= P. got an invitation to explain it to him!

All because Philip was willing to ask a question! I can't think of a better spot for this man to be reading!

Francis Schaeffer *"Christianity demands that we have enough compassion to learn the questions of our generation. The trouble with too many of us is that we want to be able to answer these questions instantly, as though we could take a funnel, put it in one ear and pour in the facts, and then go out and regurgitate them and win all the discussion. It cannot be. Answering questions is hard work...Begin to listen with compassion."*

VV32-33 = Isaiah 53:7-8 (700 years before Jesus) = We don't know how much of the prophet Isaiah the Ethiopian had read. Isaiah 53:3-12, 55:1, 56:3

NT Wright: *Isaiah had written about the fate of Israel in their long exile AND about the promises and purposes of God to be fulfilled. Isaiah paints a picture of a suffering servant who would come to where Israel was and do for Israel (and really for the whole world) what they could NOT do for themselves. To bear in his own body the shame / reproach of the nation and God's people – to die under the weight of the world's brokenness.*

The promise of blessing for the world (53), the promise of new covenant (54), new creation (55) and blessing even for foreigners! (56)

V34 Such an honest question!

V35! The First Followers saw the Scriptures as single story – a beautiful narrative that reached culminated in Jesus. Jesus is that suffering servant!

Mark 10:45 *"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many."*

And the whole story came ALIVE! Became the Ethiopian's story!

The "keeper of treasures" found treasure beyond compare!

= In Jesus' death the power of evil has been broken / its punishment exhausted!

EVEN in all his foreignness and brokenness – it's a story that included him!

"This is for me too!" = "what can stand in the way of my being baptized?"

Baptism signifies entrance into the new community of God's people (family) – signifies HE BELONGS to Jesus = full on identification.

The Ethiopian started out as far-off as you can imagine. He ended up as near as you could possibly be.

We're told "the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing."

However it took place, it says he found himself at Azotus.

The Ethiopian went on his *full of joy* - full of joy! Spirit-filled child of God!

What happened to Philip? He preached the gospel to ALL the towns he passed through until he came to Caesarea. Acts 21 (20 years later) settled down in Caesarea with four unmarried daughters who prophesied. Luke calls him "the evangelist"!

God pursued the Ethiopian by sending Philip. Philip joined God in his pursuit.

3. The Pursuit Continues

God is *still* pursuing those who are far from him BY sending – sending his followers to run after, ask questions, sit with, come alongside and explain Jesus. Obedience to God’s call means joining him in his pursuit of those far from him. Opportunities are before us every day. Unplanned. Unrehearsed. Easy to shrug off.

Where have we been sent? St. Pete! The campus?

Expect guidance from the Spirit of God. He’s pursuing others by sending *us*. It’s our turn to ask: *“Do you understand what you’re reading?”*