

## Philip and the Ethiopian: Steps of Obedience

Acts 8:25-40

We've been walking through the book of Acts, looking at the *acts*- the *works*- of Jesus through His newly formed church. And most recently, we've also seen attempts at human orchestrated acts/works, as Pastor Dave presented last Sunday- looking at a man named Simon who desired to "buy" the ability of giving out the Holy Spirit. And Peter called him out on it, calling out the human sin nature being displayed through bitterness and bondage to sin. God had, and still has, His way of working and moving in this world, and we can choose to humbly submit to His ways, or we can wrongfully try to push our own agendas and attempt to work in our own ways- according to our own selfishness, wisdom, and pride.

Now this man Simon, had believed in Jesus because of Philip's proclamation of the gospel, but then Simon gave the impression through his actions that perhaps he hadn't yet really fully surrendered to Jesus. And as Pastor Dave mentioned, we don't know what happened in the life of Simon, whether he turned away and proved himself not to be a true follower of Jesus, or whether he repented and got his heart right with the Lord. We just don't know the rest of his story. But we do know more about what took place in the life of Philip after this event. What took place- specifically Philip's step by step obedience- is something I believe will offer hope, inspiration, and encouragement for each one of us this morning. So, let's get into it!

We see in Acts 8:25, that after many believed in the city of Samaria- Philip, Peter and John were on their way back home to Jerusalem; and as they were traveling back, they stopped along the way in various villages within the Samaritan region and preached Jesus- [Acts 8:25...](#)

Now I imagine, this journey back to Jerusalem was a trip highly anticipated, I'm sure they were excited to be heading back home. If you look back to [verses 4 and 5](#), we are given the impression that Philip was one of these "scattered" from Jerusalem, in other words he had left Jerusalem in order to avoid being dragged out from his home by the hand of Saul and others

persecuting the followers of Jesus. Now maybe by this time the persecution has moved away from Jerusalem on to other regions, like Damascus as we'll see in the next chapter of Acts, and if so- I can imagine Philip feeling a little bit of a relief and excitement to be returning back to Jerusalem. Perhaps there was a little feeling of accomplishment: "I did my part, I accomplished my mission, I shared Jesus with people in Samaria..." But look what happens in [verse 26](#)... and then [verse 27](#): "*So he got up and went...*"

Now we don't know how this angel appeared to Philip, whether it was in a dream, or in a face to face encounter, but I imagine the human reaction to this could have very well been "*What? After the good things that happened as a result of my obedience to preach in Samaria? No- I'm ready for a break. You want me to go past my home in Jerusalem, after I've been away for a while (Samaria was a region north of Jerusalem) you want me to go further south, past Jerusalem, into the desert... to do what? I went to the big city of Samaria, and even little villages in Samaria, why would you tell me to go hang out on an unfrequented desert road, when I have my eyes set on my home in Jerusalem?*" Now I'm just speculating, we don't know for sure if all these thoughts passed through Philip's mind, but if we put ourselves in his shoes, it's probably not too far-fetched to imagine these types of thoughts attempting to break into his mind. I believe here we have another example of an opportunity for someone, Philip, to do things God's way, or man's way... and Philip chooses to submit to God's way- not giving into any temptation to elevate his own desires and comfort, and, he takes this first step of obedience. Without knowing anything about where it will lead him, without knowing the results of doing what God through the angel told him to do, not having anywhere close to the whole picture, Philip just obeys and goes, doing what the angel of God told him to do.

Part of my wife and I's story is that we were introduced through a friend while living 1000s of miles apart. And as we got to know each other via phone calls, letters, emails, I wrestled with God on what this relationship would eventually turn out to become. You see, I was previously engaged and had lost my fiancé in a car wreck, and that combined with the distance, and not having met Nikki face to face, made it very difficult for me to trust God,

and difficult for me to have hope in what would be the result of this long-distance relationship investment. But one day as I was praying and expressing to the Lord these fears, concerns, hesitations- I felt Him very clearly speak to my heart that I didn't need to mentally wrestle with the outcomes and results that would happen several steps down the road, no- I just needed to focus on the step God was prompting me to take *today*, and then let *Him* handle the further steps in their time, to let *Him* handle the outcomes and results down the road. I believe this is where Philip might have been here- maybe not quite understanding why he's ended up here- why the Lord would allow him to get scattered from his home in Jerusalem, why Peter and John were able to return, but he was to travel further south... yet- he's trusting the Lord, resisting any temptation to be disobedient- choosing to take that next step of obedience. [Verse 27-28...](#)

Ethiopia, also known as Cush in the Bible, was a region south of Egypt, that also bordered the Red Sea. According to our modern borders, much of modern-day Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia would have been included in the biblical area known as Cush or Ethiopia. This area, at that time, was one of the four great powers of the world. You had Rome, Persia, China, and Ethiopia- all very powerful earthly nation states. And so this man, this Ethiopian eunuch, was super high ranking. He was perhaps even considered to be second to the Queen- second in charge- of this powerful, wealthy kingdom. And it was a cultural norm in several nation's royal courts for the male servants, the males running the day to day operations of the kingdom- for them to be castrated for the purpose of ensuring trustworthiness and dedication to their high responsibility role. This ensured there wasn't any sexual activity with a queen, or a king's hareem, and it also discouraged any possible overthrow attempts since eunuchs would be incapable of establishing their own dynasty through descendants. Now if you have any more questions about eunuchs, after the service Pastor Dave will be available to answer those questions. 😊

Now, you may be wondering "what was this guy doing coming to Jerusalem to worship?" He's not Jewish, life is probably pretty good and luxurious for him down in Ethiopia, there were plenty of other "gods" for him to worship

there, and the distance was roughly 500 miles away- which is a pretty long way when you're traveling via horse drawn carriage. Personally, I think the answer to that question might be found in remembering that many years earlier, the Queen of Sheba visited King Solomon to see with her own eyes the magnificent kingdom that God had blessed Solomon with. There she saw the temple he had built, and she tested him, and was thoroughly impressed with his God-given wisdom and blessings. The land of Sheba is now considered to have been the land of Ethiopia, so I believe that ever since the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon, there have been those coming from Ethiopia, especially those in governmental positions, in order to worship the one true God in Jerusalem. That's my theory at least. And you can imagine Philip walking on this dusty, remote desert road that descends down from the higher elevation of Jerusalem, and there on the road from a distance he sees this dark-skinned man in a fancy, large, horse drawn chariot/carriage type thing, with a top, doors, open windows, a driver, perhaps some extra servants, and food/water/supplies attached on the back. Perhaps they had just stopped their journey for a quick break. Perhaps the scroll of Isaiah had just been purchased after visiting the Jewish temple, and here he is, reading out loud, what was written. And here in this moment, Philip is told to take another step of obedience. [Verse 29](#)...

Now, put yourself in Philip's shoes... wouldn't it be really easy to be like *"God, you're not talking out loud, but I kind of feel in my heart that maybe you're nudging me to go up to this guy... but I'm not sure I can connect with him... I mean... he has different skin color than me, and his country's customs are so different, he probably won't even understand... as a servant of the royal court I heard those guys don't even have a whoo hoo... 😊 right? He's already reading your word, I'm sure You can take it from here and speak to him... it's probably better if you just connect him with someone back in Ethiopia... besides, he's obviously super wealthy, he has all the Queen's wealth at his disposal... I don't want to bother him on his trip, he has a super long journey ahead of him... he might even get mad at me for having the audacity of approaching him, those are pretty long spears the driver and guards are carrying..."* Aren't these types of thoughts pretty common when God is nudging us to interact with someone over spiritual matters? We have

to be aware and prepared that thoughts are going to attempt to dissuade us from interacting with someone on a spiritual level. But don't be deceived, don't give in to these thoughts- trust God and take that next step of obedience without worrying about the results and outcome. Do as Philip did, and even run, hurry as quick as you can to obey, verse 30. ([verse 30-31](#))

God had gotten Philip to this point, through the circumstances of persecution in Jerusalem, through the encounter with Simon and others in Samaria, through the angel telling him to go down south to the desert road, through the Spirit in his heart saying to go up to the Ethiopian's chariot. And I'm sure there were other God-obeying steps in his life beforehand that proceeded all these. And with each step, he's adjusting and interacting according to what God prompted and according to the circumstance being presented. At this point in his journey walking with the Lord, Philip is probably starting to see why God had him take some of these previous steps- he probably at this point can see that God wants him to minister to this man who is seeking God through coming to Jerusalem for worship, and who is seeking God through reading the book of Isaiah. Let's continue, verse 32... ([verses 32-35](#))

It's pretty awesome that God intended for Philip to be right here in this moment, as the Ethiopian was reading this specific passage, in which Isaiah was prophesying details about the death of Jesus the Messiah. And I like the way the bible says "then Philip opened his mouth." He wasn't shy. This was obviously a God orchestrated event, there wasn't any reason to hold back or tip-toe around the truth- Philip opened his mouth. I think we as followers of Jesus really struggle with this at times- we sometimes don't open our mouths in moments like these when we should, yet we open our mouths in other moments when we shouldn't! Lord, give us peace, trust, and humility when we shouldn't open our mouths; and courage, boldness, confidence when we should open our mouths. Verse 36 and following... ([verses 36-40](#))

So, at some point, the carriage gets going again while Philip is talking about Jesus with this man, and Philip doesn't seem to get antsy that he's getting further and further away from Jerusalem, on a not highly traveled, lonely

desert road. And judging from the Ethiopian's question about baptism, it's clear Philip not only explained about Isaiah's prophecy concerning Jesus, but also explained what Jesus commanded His followers to do after choosing to follow Him. Perhaps Philip was aiming to give this man as much information as possible in the time he had, knowing that he probably would never see him again. How often is it that we bump into someone in life, in which we have a few minutes with them, knowing that more than likely, we'll probably never see them again. It happens all the time. And yet, even in knowing we'll probably not ever see them again, we're a little nervous about what they'll think of us if we get "too spiritual" with them. If anything, knowing we probably won't see them again, should cause us to be emboldened to share an encouraging Jesus truth with them. That moment, right there, may be the exact moment in time in which God has orchestrated you meeting them, so that you might be able to pray for them, or so that they could hear a scripture verse, or so they could receive encouragement to think more about their spiritual journey.

I still have a long way to grow in this area, but I'm trying to be more aware of opportunities in which God would have me to be bolder. I'm an introvert, and sometimes I have difficulty in engaging with people, especially people I don't know. But again, I'm trying to be bolder, and take those first steps of obedience without worrying about the outcome. A couple weeks ago, my family and I were at a swimming hole in the forest, and we were the only ones there. It was awesome. And then all of a sudden, a van showed up and out poured a bunch of teenage campers with two camp counselors. Ugh. But we were friendly, and exchanged some small talk, helped them with the rope swing that was there, and I noticed one of the camp counselors had a tattoo in Hebrew. I asked him about it, and he told me he and his family were Jewish- in ancestry, not so much spiritually- as in they weren't practicing Judaism. The brief conversation ended, but I felt like if there was an opportunity, I was supposed to encourage him in some way concerning his relationship with Jesus. Well, that opportunity happened a few minutes later, as he walked back to the van by himself while the rest of the group stayed by the water. I felt God's Spirit tug on my heart to follow him and take a moment while no one else was around, to say something to him

about Jesus. I very easily could have said *“No, this is dumb, don’t bother him, I’m with my family on a break, what could I possibly say to him without sounding like a weirdo?”* But, I took that step- I followed him to the van, wearing my swim trunks and my big rimmed Indiana Jones hat, and said (probably somewhat awkwardly) something like this: *“Hey it was cool meeting you- I want to give you an encouragement and blessing, and tell you that your purpose in life, especially with Jewish ancestry, is to find Jesus and have a relationship with Him. May He guide you, lead you, and bless you in your life.”* And he said thank you for that blessing, and then all the other campers came up from the river and began loading up in the van, and they were off. I have no idea what has taken place in his life as a result of that little conversation, but I don’t have to worry about the results, my part -your part- is to just take that next step of obedience no matter what it is we sense the Lord leading us to do.

It’s beautiful that here in this account, not only do we witness courageous steps of obedience from Philip, but also even from this new Ethiopian brother in Christ. Here he is with eagerness to take the next step of obedience in following Jesus, by getting baptized. No fear of getting delayed even further on their trip, no concern of what the chariot driver or other servants might think, no hesitation based on what might happen when he returns and the Queen and others hear about his new faith and the ceremony of baptism he took part in. Think about what could have been at stake here- his job was not a job someone would want to risk losing, I mean, he had body parts cut off in order to get this job. 😊 I’m sure there could have been all kinds of thoughts entering his mind trying to persuade him to just play things cool, and process and decide later what he should work out concerning what he has now learned about Jesus. But no, he felt God’s Spirit nudging him to take another step, and seeing the opportunity of water (which probably wasn’t a common thing to see on a desert road) he then seized the moment, and took another step of obedience in getting baptized.

In [verse 39](#), God’s intervention and orchestration ramps up to a whole other level and whisks Philip away to Azotus which is modern day Ashdod, Israel, a city on the Mediterranean coast, West of Jerusalem and north of Gaza.

Scotty from Star Trek ain't got nothing on God concerning teleportation. Beam me up Jesus! At this point Philip is probably further from Jerusalem than he was when meeting with the Ethiopian, and instead of trying to make his way back to Jerusalem, he goes up the coast (most likely because that's the way God's Spirit was leading him), stopping and sharing Jesus in the cities along the way, all the way up to the coastal city of Caesarea, which is way beyond Jerusalem and way beyond Samaria.

As with many of the events in Acts, this story is a big deal. In this extraordinary time, God was miraculously orchestrating events and circumstances so that people very much different than the Jewish people, would hear of Jesus and have the opportunity to receive His forgiveness and blessing. He loved this Ethiopian so much that he rerouted Philip's life in order that this Ethiopian would get to hear of God's love for him. And the knowledge of God's love and salvation did not stop with this Ethiopian man- no, I believe he took with him this newfound knowledge- Jesus' message of hope, forgiveness, and salvation- and through one slightly uncomfortable step of obedience followed by another, followed by another, followed by another... many throughout the nation of Ethiopia surrendered their life to King Jesus, and are now part of his eternal Kingdom as a result. Why do I think this? History tells us that in the 300s, Jesus' gospel message in Ethiopia, by that time, had spread so widely that the nation adopted Christianity as it's official religion. A nation loosely connected to the God of the Jews because of a historic encounter between their Queen and King Solomon, ends up professing Christianity as their recommended and official national faith, why? Because of one uncomfortable act of obedience, followed by another, followed by another, followed by another. The rerouting of Philip's life, his step after step of obedience, ended up having eternal significance in the lives of millions of people.

I don't know about you, but I pretty much lose it in my car when I'm following my phone's directions and it all of a sudden says "rerouting." That drives me crazy. Just get me to where I want to go, right?! Stop changing it on me. 😊 Philip could have totally felt like God was doing this... rerouting... "What, the desert road?- I'm heading to Jerusalem!"... rerouting... "What,



Azotus? ...rerouting... "Caesarea?" And each step, he could have resisted those reroutes, he could have let them harden his heart towards God. But no, he trusted, and took one more step of obedience.

I want to ask, is there anyone here this morning that feels like their life has been somewhat rerouted by God? If so, I want you to consider *who* God might be wanting to share His love and truth with, as a result of your life reroute, and as a result of your next step of obedience. (repeat) As we've seen, these little steps of obedience can have massive effects- but don't worry about the results and effects of your obedience, just focus on tuning in to the Lord's voice closely that you can adjust to a reroute and take whatever that next step is, so that He can do the big things He wants to do in you, through you, and around you.

Right now, I'd like for you to hear from some of our folks here at One Church. They each have a quick, truncated, real life, true, personal story they want to share with you. And I hope that as they share, you and I would be encouraged and inspired to take one more step of obedience as His followers and witnesses.

What is your next step of obedience? There are specific ways in which God wants to use you, and He might not give you the full details, but trust He's going to get you there- you just have to take one step at a time.