



05

SESSION FIVE

Philip the Evangelist

SESSION SUMMARY

Throughout the Book of Acts, we see examples of seemingly “chance encounters” that proved to be providential. In this session, we’ll read more about one of these encounters in which Philip, an evangelist and follower of Jesus, was prompted by God to go on a journey. Philip’s journey led him to meeting an Ethiopian and the expansion of the kingdom. The Spirit orchestrated Philip’s meeting, and He continues this work today, leading Christians to use the Scriptures to show others Jesus and how they can believe in Him for eternal life.

SCRIPTURE

Acts 8:26-40

THE POINT

God calls us to be faithful and obedient witnesses.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

If we are to believe the secular narrative for how the world works, then most of life is a game of chance. The events that shape our lives, careers, and relationships are all an accident. We are in the right place at the right time, and suddenly we meet our spouse. A chance encounter leads to a dream job. Or worse, happenstance leads to horrible accidents, mistakes, and misery. If this story is true, then all we have to hope for in the world is good luck, and all we can point to for what makes life good and beautiful comes by accident.

But then there are true stories like this one of how a couple met and fell in love. It began while he was on a mission trip with his church, and she was on a mission trip with another church. They happened to be in the same place and their trips only overlapped by a day. They served together for an afternoon at a medical clinic in the middle of a jungle in Central America and went their separate ways. Almost a year later, they bumped into each other at a wedding, and they were married six months later. Ten years later, they're still going strong.

- **What “chance encounters” have you experienced in life or heard about?**

We could fill books with stories of “chance encounters.” Does it make sense that all of these stories are accidental? Is “chance” the best description of what’s going on? Does that fit what we experience? In the Scriptures, there are no accidents, and there is no such thing as chance. Instead, these chance encounters are actually divine appointments. Consider Joseph in Egypt, David fighting Goliath, and Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. For the Christian, this way of seeing the world is a call to pay attention.

Option 2

Connection. Coincidence. Happy accident. By chance. Luck of the draw. All of these words or phrases describe an unexpected meeting of people or details that would otherwise be completely unconnected. For example, a guy finding a telephone number on a slip of paper in the middle of a theme park with the name “Ben” written on it; then calling the number and finding on the other end of the line his best friend from elementary school.

- **When have you experienced a coincidence? What happened?**

While these occurrences may seem random, believers know God is sovereign over all things. As in today’s session, Philip taking a different road was not a coincidence, but part of God’s plan. In the same way, we can view coincidences in our own lives as opportunities from God.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God calls us to be faithful and obedient witnesses.

CHARACTERS

- **Holy Spirit:** third Person of the Trinity
- **Philip:** an evangelist and Christ-follower, well known for a Spirit-led encounter he had with an Ethiopian traveler

PLOT

After Stephen was martyred, the church began to experience extreme persecution and many of Jesus' followers fled throughout Judea and Samaria. Philip, a Christ-follower, first went to Samaria. However, God called him to take a road which traveled between Jerusalem and Gaza. Philip obeyed and God used him to teach Scripture to an Ethiopian man on that road.

TIMELINE

THE ETHIOPIAN TRAVELER

Philip faithfully shares the message of the gospel.

PETER VISITS CORNELIUS

The gospel goes to the Gentiles.

FROM PERSECUTOR TO PREACHER

The opposition leader, Paul, is forever changed when he encounters the risen Christ.

PHILIP OBEYED GOD

There's a thread throughout the Gospels and the Book of Acts that sheds light on the reality of God's providence and planning. People find themselves suddenly prompted to hit the road, or they suddenly show up just in time to encounter Jesus or the apostles. Through these many surprise encounters, God built up His church. On one such occasion, one of Jesus' followers was sent to the middle of nowhere without explanation.

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. 27 And he rose and went. 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 28 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." (Acts 8:26-29)

This story is significant in the Book of Acts. For starters, during that time, Ethiopia was about as far away as you could get. Talking about Ethiopia would be like talking about the other side of the world, even though these regions don't seem so far apart on modern maps. In the minds of the original readers of Acts, the introduction of an Ethiopian to the story was a big deal. Especially one who had to come to Jerusalem in search of God. This story introduces the global scope of the gospel message—it's a word for the nations, not just the Jews.

Philip was sent by God to be on mission for Him. Upon hearing the angel's command, Philip obeyed immediately. Just a few verses earlier, Philip was enjoying a thriving ministry in Samaria (8:4-8). One could imagine that a command like this—to undertake a lengthy journey, prompted only by the voice of God—might be met with some inner resistance. Any thriving work is difficult to leave and doing so takes a great deal of faith.

- **Philip's response was immediate. If you had a thriving ministry like Philip and God asked you to leave, how would you respond?** (p. 40, PSG)
- **When has God asked you to leave something familiar for the unknown?** (p. 40, PSG)

PHILIP GUIDED HIM THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES

Philip approached the chariot and heard the Ethiopian reading the Scriptures. Look at what he heard and how he responded:

³⁰ When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you’re reading?”

³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone guides me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the Scripture passage he was reading was this: He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb is silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who will describe his generation? For his life is taken from the earth. ³⁴ The eunuch said to Philip, “I ask you, who is the prophet saying this about — himself or someone else?” ³⁵ Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning with that Scripture. (Acts 8:30-35)

More evidence appears here to show how God prepared both men for this encounter. The Ethiopian was immediately receptive to Philip, inviting him up onto the chariot to explain the Scriptures to him. Not only that, but he also *happened* to be reading a passage from the Book of Isaiah which clearly talks about the sacrificial death of Jesus. The whole conversation was set up for Philip to point this man to Jesus.

Philip didn’t have the credentials of a Bible scholar or a teacher of the law—he was an ordinary guy. However, because he was filled with the Spirit and because of what he’d seen and experienced in his own life of faith, he responded with confidence and clarity. They read a passage from Isaiah, and the Ethiopian invited Philip to explain it. This gave Philip a starting point to share the gospel with the man.

The whole story of the Bible, from one end to the other, points to Jesus. The story of Israel and the whole of the Old Testament are about anticipating Jesus. We see it in how they longed for a king, though all their kings fell short of the glory they aspired to. We see it in the high demands of the law, which no person can attain. We see it in the countless sorrows described in the Psalms and Prophets, where the brokenness of the world was displayed and the people cried out, “How long, oh Lord?” Jesus manages to embody all that the Old Testament longs for and points to. Even the broader story of the Old Testament—exile from the garden of Eden, longing for the promised land, and exile (again) at the hands of the Babylonians—points to Jesus as the conquering King who defeats Satan, sin, and death and brings us back home to God.

- **Like Philip, you probably aren’t a Bible scholar. What are some ways you can use Scripture you know to share the gospel and point others to Jesus, right where you are?** (*p. 41, PSG*)

PHILIP LED HIM TO RESPOND IN FAITH

The Ethiopian official was clearly moved by the story Philip shared and was eager to respond.

36 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?” 38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 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. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. (Acts 8:36-40)

All of the elements of true conversion are on display here. The Ethiopian was eager to believe, not forced to believe or pressured to convert. Philip explained how the passage of Scripture he was reading pointed to Jesus, whose death and resurrection reconciles us to God. It seems Philip also explained enough that the Ethiopian was eager to identify with Jesus through baptism. His question was crucial: What reason was there that he shouldn't have been baptized that very moment? Some might have offered a variety of reasons not to baptize him: He was an Ethiopian, a foreigner—not an ethnic Jew. Philip was filled with the Spirit and didn't put any stock in those hindrances. It is clear the Ethiopian believed what he heard about Jesus, so Philip baptized him without delay.

Evangelism and conversion really are that simple. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we point people to Jesus and invite them to trust that He alone can save us from our sins. If they believe, we welcome them into God's family as believers. We can share “just the facts” without asking people to make something of them, but that's not the goal of evangelism. We don't just share what we know, we invite others to join us in following Jesus. The hope of an evangelist is to help someone see Jesus as Lord; to see how His life, death, and resurrection takes away the sins of the world and brings us home to God the Father. In Philip's short conversation with the Ethiopian, this miracle happened. The Ethiopian saw Jesus as Lord and was ready to follow Him into the waters of baptism.

As this story concludes, we see the two parted ways just as suddenly as they came together. It's implied here that the Spirit carried him away and deposited him in Azotus. The Ethiopian, filled with the joy of being a new Christian and filled with the Holy Spirit, went on his own way. We must imagine the Spirit continued His work through this man and the story of Jesus spread and grew roots in Africa.

TIMELINE

EARLY MISSIONARIES

Paul and Barnabas set out to plant churches among the nations.

CHRIST ALONE

Salvation comes by grace alone through faith in Christ alone.

SALVATION AVAILABLE TO ALL

The message of the gospel reaches people of different backgrounds.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Mission of the Church (p. 42, PSG)

The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen king, Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the glory of God and the good of the world.

CHRIST CONNECTION

The most ordinary of circumstances might be a divine appointment.

A “chance encounter,” as the world often sees it, might be a crucial moment in someone’s life. There are no coincidences. Before we let this make us anxious or fearful of missing an important moment, let’s not forget that we never experience these moments alone. The Holy Spirit accompanies us, guides us, and provides us with these opportunities. He empowers us for this work with boldness and with words, and He has already gone ahead of us to soften hearts and open ears to hear the good news of Jesus Christ. As we go on our way in the world, let us go and make disciples for Jesus.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What are some ways you've been surprised by how God has led you, your church, or your friends to be on mission?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Do you think it is possible to tell the good news about Jesus from anywhere in the Scriptures? Why or why not?** *We can certainly share the gospel from any place in Scripture since all Scripture points to Jesus (Luke 24:27).*
- **What are some reasons we might feel intimidated to try explaining the Scriptures to an unbeliever?** *Reasons might include a sense of inadequacy in being able to explain the gospel correctly, a fear that we might not be able to answer any objections that are raised, a feeling of personal unworthiness in sharing the gospel, and so forth.*
- **How can we grow in our ability and confidence to share Christ from the Scriptures?** *One simple way to grow in this area is by simply sharing. Make it a personal goal to naturally direct everyday conversations with people toward the gospel.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

It would have been easy for Philip to cling to this spiritually rich moment, much like Peter, James, and John during the transfiguration in Matthew 17. We see that temptation at work, when Jesus allowed them to witness His transfiguration. Peter offered to build shelters for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, as if to say, “Let’s just stay here and keep this thing going.” Almost as soon as he said it, the moment ended—Jesus’ physical appearance returned to normal and Moses and Elijah were gone. This is a perfect metaphor for what we all experience in similar situations. We want to make the good times last, to stay where we are, to linger over what God has done. We feel this way sometimes at the end of a retreat, camp, or in the midst of a rich worship experience.

- **Why do you think God doesn’t mean for us to linger in these moments for now?**
While these moments are a gift and can be useful to our own growth and maturity, there is still work to be done. Our prize in running this great race of faith is in the future, when Christ returns. Until then, there are others who still need to hear the good news about what God has done for them.
- **How can these spiritually rich moments fuel us toward faithful witnessing?** *They can provide a sense of urgency toward evangelism, as well as an empathy for those who have never heard the gospel.*



HEART

When we think about sharing the gospel with a lost world, we often focus on the hostility and resistance Christians experience. However, resistance and hostility aren’t always the reactions to the gospel. The story of the Ethiopian reminds us that many are seeking God as a result of God first seeking them. In this case, the Ethiopian knew enough to come to Jerusalem to look for Him, but in many cases, people will look wherever some semblance of hope and spirituality can be found.

- **How have you witnessed people looking for God in all the wrong places?** *Answers will vary.*
- **How can we cultivate hearts willing to respond obediently to the Spirit’s leading, no matter the risks?** *One way is by listening to the stories of other faithful believers who treasure Christ above the things this world offers.*



HANDS

The next leg in Philip’s journey continued his ministry of expanding the kingdom among the Gentiles. Azotus, where he suddenly appeared, was about nineteen miles away. This expansion of the kingdom happened because someone with a willing and submissive heart obeyed God’s call to leave a thriving ministry in Samaria and seek out one person who needed to hear the gospel.

- **What are some ways you can do the work of a Spirit-empowered evangelist in the coming days?** *Answers will vary.*
- **Where are some places in your life where you imagine this work will occur?**
Answers will vary.

▶ ADDITIONAL INFO

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPMissionWin18)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject