

NOTE FROM PASTOR JONATHAN

Acts 8:26-40

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.” ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” ³¹ And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² 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.

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth.”

³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. 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.

Let’s Warm Up: Questions to break the ice.

1. What makes sense in your culture/language/background that is hard for outsiders to understand?

When I was learning Spanish, it took a while to understand that *everything* has a gender. I get that people, animals, or clothing are masculine or feminine, but why are televisions feminine but computer monitors masculine? But for native Spanish speakers, that’s just how it is. Studying Greek in seminary, we learned masculine, feminine, *and* neuter. They also don’t always correspond to the gender they reference!

I’ve had to explain to Canadians that in Florida, it’s normal to see gators here and there. If you go near the edge of a lake or canal, be careful! Check out this video of Sheriff deputies wrangling a gator that was hanging out near a business park (<https://youtu.be/PVaNI-JCRgc>). It’ll get processed for meat and hide!

I became a Canadian citizen last year, and I’ve explained to some Americans how we can be proud of Canada without making it a competition. You can celebrate how wonderful your country is without putting down other countries.

In this week’s passage, Philip, a Jewish disciple of Jesus, explains to a foreigner who is confused about the Old Testament.

2. Have you ever experienced some unexpected cross-cultural influences?

Did you know that Mahjong is *huge* with Jewish women (<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/mah-jongg/>)? I was surprised when I found a sign at the Dallas Jewish Community Center for weekly Mahjong.

Years ago, I was visiting family in Taiwan. My aunt wanted to show me her favorite movie. I expected a Chinese-language movie. Or at least a Hollywood one. She pulled out the Bollywood musical comedy Three Idiots (<https://youtu.be/K0eDlFX9GMc>), starring Aamir Khan (who was 44 years old playing a university student). It turns out Taiwanese people *loved* Three Idiots because they shared the same struggles with Indians of a cut-throat education system and family pressures (<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chennai/why-amp393-idiotsamp39-was-a-rage-in-taiwan/articleshow/11162370.cms>).

In this week's passage, what began as a Jewish religion crossed cultural barriers.

3. Share about someone who explained the Good News of Jesus to you.

For some of us, we've heard the Gospel from many sources before coming to believe. Pick the one that stands out the most for you.

For others, we remember that one person who explained everything to us.

Who was it? Was it a parent, friend, stranger, Life Group leader, or pastor? What points did they emphasize? Did they say something that clicked for you?

In this week's passage, Philip explains the Good News of Jesus to a confused Ethiopian eunuch.

4. Explain a movie or show without context and see if others can guess what it is.

Explaining a movie or show poorly can be a fun activity. Without the context, it sounds like complete nonsense or is confusing, but if you watch it, everything makes sense.

For example, "An old hermit takes a boy to a bar and cuts off a doctor's arm. The boy's dad later kills the hermit." Sounds weird, right? That's "Star Wars: A New Hope", where Obi-Wan takes Luke to the Mos Eisley Cantina and cuts off Dr. Evazan's arm with a lightsaber. Later, Darth Vader kills Obi-Wan. Everyone who isn't a Star Wars nerd is still confused while the nerds are saying, "Ah, yes, the true canon."

How about, "A girl is swept away by a tornado into a strange land. There, she befriends unique characters who help her return home." No, I'm not talking about The Wizard of Oz. It's obviously the Korean drama hit "Crash Landing on You" (<https://youtu.be/GVQGWgeVc4k>).

Lastly, "A man's scientific genius leads to almost cannibalizing his own children." Of course, that's "Honey, I Shrunk the Kids" where Canadian treasure Rick Moranis is a genius inventor whose invention shrinks his children. He almost eats his kid after he falls in the cereal (<https://youtu.be/v-vNO6BXiii>). This scene is still stressful 36 years later!

In this week's passage, the Ethiopian eunuch was confused about a prophecy because he didn't have the full context.

Let's Get Started: Questions to start thinking about the main themes.

5. Why does God use people to spread the Gospel (as opposed to angels, for example)?

When I was at a previous church, Pastor Anthony Law (https://willingdon.org/ministry/ltm/anthony_l/), a missionary we support, led a training before evangelism at the Richmond Night Market. He asked us why God chose us humans to share the Gospel. Wouldn't it be more impactful and convincing if God sent angels to do it instead? God sending an angel to share the Gospel at the Night Market or your workplace or school would have such an undeniable wow factor!

Pastor Anthony said that angels don't know what it's like to be saved by Jesus, but we do! Jesus loved humans so much that He became human to save them (Hebrews 2:16-17). If angels tell people about Jesus' salvation, they're talking about something they have never experienced and never will. They will never be adopted as children of God or know what it's like to be forgiven through Jesus' death. They can't share how Jesus changed their lives. But we can. We are living testimonies and evidence of Jesus' work.

6. What can make the Good News of Jesus confusing or difficult to understand for a new believer?

If you've been a Christian for a while, things seem so normal and make sense. It's just ... natural. In an evangelism class in seminary, the professor asked, "What would a non-believer think if they walked into a church and people were singing about a fountain filled with blood? Or about being washed in the blood?" As someone who knows the Gospel, it makes sense. I'm washed in the blood! People who aren't Christian would probably think, "Oh no, what have I gotten myself into?" "Did these people all literally take a blood bath?" "Where is the nearest exit?"

Context of the story. So much of the Bible and Jesus is built on other things. For example, Jesus as savior only makes sense when we take into account sin. The Bible establishes in Genesis 3 that people naturally rebel. As you read through the Bible, you're constantly reminded just how evil people are and how much they need to be saved. Jesus is the Davidic king as prophesied to David and Solomon. He was the descendant promised to Abraham 2,000 years earlier. Jesus was crucified on a cross because those hung on a tree are accursed (Deuteronomy 22:22-23). And so on. You get a much fuller idea of the Gospel when you know the context. And in order to know the Gospel, you need to have some context to build on.

Worldview. Non-believers and believers have very different ways of seeing the world. Many are spiritual, thinking the goal is to unlock their own spiritual potential. Others see the world as purely material and study the world from a scientific angle. Some see their own sinfulness and try to atone or pay through sacrifices or rituals, while others see themselves as inherently good without any need for dealing with sin. Some believe all roads lead to Rome, so people can believe whatever they believe. You get the idea. There are so many different worldviews. To come to Jesus requires shifting one's whole paradigm for seeing the world. Some non-Christian paradigms are closer to the Bible than others, but all are a long way off.

Spiritual Blindness/Death. People naturally don't look for the real God (Romans 3:10-12). They want to find or make their own. The Gospel is veiled, and people are blinded (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). They're dead and need God's supernatural work to be brought to life (Ephesians 2:1-7). He needs to shine His light in our hearts so we can see Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:6). Without this supernatural work, they will never understand.

7. What concerns do the people around you have? How can we bridge those concerns to the Good News of Jesus?

People have concerns. Some are scared of the global political climate. Instability, war, injustice. Perhaps they need to know that there's a benevolent, loving God in control. There's an eternal world with an eternal king that will experience eternal peace.

Many struggle with self-worth. Perhaps they need to know that God loves them irrespective of their socioeconomic status, physical beauty, or followers on social media. The same God made everyone.

Immigrants and refugees are often lonely and feel marginalized or overlooked. There's an international family that welcomes everyone who believes in Jesus.

Others are overwhelmed with guilt and shame for the terrible things they've done. They need to know that Jesus' salvation extends even to murderers (1 Timothy 1:15-16) and prostitutes (Matthew 21:31-32).

Some are facing the end of their lives and they're worried about what's next. God has the power to bring the dead back to life. He offers eternal life where we will never have to face illnesses or death.

Let's Dig In: Questions to discuss the passage and how we can respond.**8. How did God use persecution to expand His kingdom?**

The Bible is full of examples of God turning plans against Him to His advantage. Pharaoh tried to resist God's power and keep the Israelite as slaves, but God used his resistance to demonstrate His power through the plagues (Exodus 9:16). Balak wanted Balaam to curse the Israelites, but God used him to bless His people (Numbers 22:36-24:25). Haman plotted to kill the Jewish people, but God flipped it so the Jewish people could defeat their enemies (Esther).

Paul and other anti-Christians wanted to shut down Christianity. This led to Christians scattering and taking the Good News about Jesus everywhere they went. In this week's passage, God sent Philip to the Samaritans and then to the Ethiopian eunuch.

9. Why was the eunuch a surprising candidate for the Gospel?**Why was he a great candidate for the Gospel?**

Here are some ways he was both a surprising and a great candidate.

Ethiopian. Ethiopia doesn't have much interaction with the Jews in the Bible. It's called Cush in parts of the Old Testament (e.g., Genesis 2:13). They appear in prophecies, but not much outside of them. The eunuch will now be a missionary to a far-off land.

Eunuch. Eunuchs were usually castrated, meaning part of their male anatomy was removed. They often oversaw the king's wives, so castration was supposed to prevent them from doing anything with them. They also took care of other important functions. His anatomy restricted his ability to worship in the temple (Deuteronomy 23:1). It also prevented him from having biological descendants or a family.

Now that Jesus died and came back from the dead, the temple became obsolete (Hebrews 10:11-13). The eunuch now had full, unrestricted access to God through Jesus. Before, he had to worship outside the temple, but now he

can approach God's throne as an equal with other followers (Hebrews 4:16). I bet he was excited! Becoming a Christian, he gains the ability to have spiritual children, despite not being able to have physical children.

Worships God. It's surprising that he worships God and has a copy of Isaiah. This guy is already into the Old Testament God, so he's ready to know where everything's headed. Philip can build on what he already knows.

A Queen's Official. He has access to a powerful ruler. Look at how eager he was to get baptized. No doubt he shared the Gospel with everyone when he got home, including the queen. I'm sure he was like Paul, hoping to bring political rulers to Jesus (Acts 26:27-29).

10. Why is it important to use the Bible to point to Jesus?

Everything points to Jesus. Philip went to Samaria and performed miracles so they would believe in Jesus. Then, when the eunuch had a Bible study question, Philip used these verses as a springboard to point to Jesus. Not only that specific Isaiah passage, but the whole Bible points to Jesus (Luke 24:27). Of course, some passages have clear connections to Jesus, while some need more effort to draw a line.

The Bible and Christianity have been used for all sorts of purposes. The Prosperity Gospel, Christian Nationalism (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/good-bad-ugly-christian-nationalism/>), self-help, diet plans, and more. History is full of people and nations abusing Scripture for their own purposes, including conquest, genocide, xenophobia, power, and consumerism. It's caused great damage to Gospel witness.

If we're not careful, we can easily use the Bible wrong and end up misleading people down the wrong path. It can easily create consumers instead of disciples.

11. How can we practice sharing the Good News of Jesus in our Life Groups?

Become Familiar with the Bible. Ultimately, the evidence for and explanation of Jesus' ministry is God's Word. It's the foundation we build on and what we point people to. Our testimonies and sharing point to the truth found in the Bible. Our Life Groups can study the Bible together by processing the sermon or doing Bible studies.

Live Out Our Faith. Life Groups are where we help each other live according to what we believe. We can encourage each other to do what we're supposed to do, exhort each other when we're on the wrong track, offer suggestions on how to live, and more. It's really hard to tell people about Jesus if you're not spending time with Him (John 15:1-15). If your life is the opposite of your message, your message will be hindered. But if it does, your message will be reinforced.

Pray Together. Come together to pray. Pray for wisdom and guidance. Pray to continually grow in relationship with Jesus. Pray for openings to share the Gospel. Pray that we'll be prepared when God provides the opportunity.

Practice. Practice what you're going to say! All good teachers and preachers practice what they're going to say. It helps them to refine what they're going to say and be prepared.

We can roleplay with each other. Have someone pretend to be that one co-worker or family member and share the Gospel with them. Others in the group can help you with your wording or provide suggestions on what to say. Do it in an environment where the stakes are low.

12. Who is the Holy Spirit directing you to share Jesus with?

An angel told Philip where to go to meet the Ethiopian and tell him about Jesus. God still directs us to people as well. Some of us have developed a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's nudging. Perhaps you've felt Him prompt you to share with a co-worker about their struggles, leading to evangelism. Some of us haven't. That's ok! In either case, we should pray to be aware of where God's leading us.

If you have someone in mind, share who they are and how you can share Jesus with them. If you don't have someone, brainstorm with your Life Group.