

Conversations on
Acts 8:26–40

Discuss this passage in light of the commentary below.

Idea! Listen together to “Give Me Your Eyes” by Brandon Heath. Discuss: Where in your life do you encounter strangers? How can you see strangers through God’s eyes and see through the masks they hide behind? What do these lyrics challenge you to do?

WHAT is important to know?

Luke tells us a great deal about these two men. Philip is one of seven Greek-speaking Jewish Christians appointed to tend to the needs of others (Acts 6:1–6). The Ethiopian is in charge of the treasury of the Candace, the official title of the queen mother, head of the government in Ethiopia. That he travels by chariot attests to his status. That he possesses a scroll of the prophet Isaiah attests to his wealth. Moreover, we are told that he is a eunuch, a not unusual situation for one whose life is devoted to serving in the queen’s court. As a castrated male, he would not have been granted access to the temple (see Deuteronomy 23:1). (*Paul W. Walaskay*)

- ✪ What is significant about the background information given about Philip? What is significant about the background information given about the Ethiopian?
- ✪ What risk does Philip take as he goes where the Holy Spirit takes him?

WHERE is God in these words?

Notice the text’s description of how the Spirit of God moves Philip to act and teach. When the messenger of God says to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza” (v. 26), Philip immediately gets up and goes. Upon seeing the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip *runs* to the chariot where the eunuch, in charge of the queen’s treasury, is sitting. He immediately asks the eunuch if he understands the passage from Isaiah (53:7–8) that the eunuch is reading aloud. (*Karen Baker-Fletcher*)

- ✪ What does this story help us understand about the nature of the Holy Spirit?
- ✪ What can stand in the way of hearing the Spirit of God?

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

As the gospel moves into the world, it gathers under the wings of God’s mercy more and more of those who have been lost, pushed away, and forgotten. “What is to prevent me from being baptized?” asked the eunuch. “Absolutely nothing,” whispered the Spirit. So the eunuch commanded the chariot to stop, and he was baptized right on the spot. Walls of prejudice and prohibition that had stood for generations came tumbling down by the breath of God’s Holy Spirit, and another man who felt lost and humiliated was found and restored in the wideness of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. (*Thomas G. Long*)

- ✪ Who in your community have “been lost, pushed away, and forgotten”?
- ✪ What can this story teach us about the power of the “breath of God’s Holy Spirit”?
- ✪ How can you work for restoration “in the wideness of God’s grace in Jesus Christ”?

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

It is Philip’s grounding in his tradition that enables him to recognize God’s leading—even when it leads him places no human authority has told him he may go—and to act in the power of the Spirit. If we were to surrender control of our own travel plans for even an hour, where might the Spirit send us? How many of our accidental encounters with other people are really divine appointments? How can we learn to tell the difference between the two? (*Barbara Brown Taylor*)

- ✪ Who are the Philips in your life— people who help you discern the Spirit of God?
- ✪ How can we better pay attention to those in our community who, like the Ethiopian, have had their voices silenced?
- ✪ If you were to surrender momentarily the control of your own travel plans, where might God’s Spirit send you?

Thank God for tumbling the “walls of prejudice and prohibition” that exist in our world.