

Philip: Just Add a Little . . .

Saints and Scoundrels – Part V

Acts 8:25-40

Introduction

In his book entitled, *America on Six Rubles a Day*, the comedian Yakov Smirnoff writes,

Coming from the Soviet Union, I was not prepared for the incredible variety of products available in American grocery stores. While on my first shopping trip, I saw powdered milk – you just add water, and you get milk. Then I saw powdered orange juice – you just add water, and you get orange juice. I saw powdered eggs – you just add water, and you get eggs. And then I saw baby powder – “What a country!”

Everyone knows that it takes more than water to create a living, breathing human being. I happen to believe that we have arrived at a misconception that the creation of a living, breathing disciple is somehow like adding a little water and “presto”. However, the truth is far from it.

Ingredients of a Witness for Jesus Christ

One of the wonderful things about the passage before us today, is that we are given the ingredients of a witness. These ingredients are seen in the life of the very first New Testament one-on-one example of someone leading another person to faith in Jesus Christ. In this wonderful example, we can actually discover some of the elements that make some believers stand out as winsome, effective, passionate testimonies for Jesus Christ.

Let us pick our study back up as we travel through the “book of action,” or Acts, to the eighth chapter. Let us go back to verses 4 through 6 to refresh our memories of the incredible Samaritan revival.

Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them. The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.

Skip to verses 14 and 15.

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

Now look at verse 25.

So, when they had solemnly testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the gospel to many villages of the Samaritans.

However (!), there is an interruption in this incredible series of events. And by the way, interruptions are often divine opportunities. Notice verse 26.

But an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, “Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a desert road.)

Add a little . . . Humility

1. The first ingredient you need to add if you want to produce an effective testimony for Christ, is a little humility.

That may seem a little strange as the first ingredient of our recipe, yet this is exactly what Philip was required to be. Philip's big evangelistic meetings were smashing success stories. Samaria was experiencing a national revival and Philip was the leading spokesman of the hour! He has the potential of leading an enormous movement of the Holy Spirit; he could be the leader of the church in Samaria!

But now (!), "Philip, leave the spotlight for the out of sight. Get off center stage and go back-stage."

If there was any desire in Philip's heart to be pre-eminent, he would have refused. He would have been like Diotrephes who was creating trouble in the church because, as John wrote in III John, verse 9,

. . . Diotrephes, . . . loves to be first among them . . .

Diotrephes loved the pre-eminence!

If anything, the evangelical church needs to add a little humility to its résumé. Instead, however, we follow the pattern of the world with our celebrities and saints; our hero status and cult-like following; our "who's who" and "who isn't so who".

There is no place in the church for "'sneetches' with stars on their bellies and 'sneetches' who don't have stars on their bellies, but oh, if they only did . . ." You can tell I have been reading that eminent theologian, Dr. Seuss! There is no such position in the church as spiritual celebrity status.

Frankly, if David had killed Goliath yesterday, he would have never made it back home. There would have been a Christian media frenzy, speaking tours, photo shoots, and interviews. David would never have had the time to write the Psalms.

We are not impressing our world – because we are too busy trying to impress each other. We are not exerting an influence over our society – because we are too concerned about exerting an influence over each other.

How about adding a little humility? Philip did not feel snubbed and unappreciated for the simple reason that he was not after his own glory – he was after the glory of God. So, "Lord, if You want me to leave the

spectacular ministry to thousands and go into the desert for the sake of one man, I'll do it."

Philip's humility teaches us the value of one soul.

Add a little . . . Flexibility

2. Secondly, if you want to follow the Lord's command in Acts, chapter 1, verse 8, to ". . . be My witnesses . . .", you need to add a little flexibility.

Some of the most amazing words in this passage of Acts, chapter 8, are found in verse 27a,

So he got up and went; . . .

God's command to Philip included:

- leave the city – for the desert;
- leave the ministry to many – for the ministry to one;
- leave the known – for the unknown (he was not told before he left, who he would meet or why!).

Have you ever wondered about the fact that God did not send the angel to tell the Ethiopian about Christ, but sent the angel to Philip to tell him to go and tell the Ethiopian about Christ? Why not send the angel?! Because angels have not been given the great commission recorded in Matthew, chapter 28, verse 19, to "Go . . . and make disciples . . ." – God gave that to us. Angels have never personally experienced God's saving grace – we have.

Philip's contact

Now notice the last part of verse 27,

. . . and there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure; and he had come to Jerusalem to worship.

We learn three things from this verse about Philip's contact.

He was an Ethiopian statesman

- First, he was an Ethiopian statesman.

This verse informs us that he was from Ethiopia, and specifically, from the court of Queen Candace. During this period of history, Ethiopia occupied the northeastern African coast of the Upper Nile River.

The kings of Ethiopia were believed to be the incarnation of the sun god and the affairs of ruling a kingdom were considered beneath their divine status. So, as was their custom, the true power of leadership lay within the grasp of the Queen Mother, who bore the hereditary title of Candace.

The text informs us that this Ethiopian statesman was the chief operating officer of the entire kingdom. He would have been the Secretary of the Treasury.

He was a eunuch

- Secondly, verse 27 also tells us that he was a eunuch.

A true eunuch would have been an emasculated man who was placed in charge of the king's harem. However, these men often rose to great positions of power, as men the king would come to trust.

Because he was a eunuch, according to the laws of the temple, he would have been denied access to the temple. Even though this verse tells us that his motive for coming to Jerusalem was to worship, he would have been unable to participate in the temple worship. However, he had probably entered the synagogues and spoken with the rabbis, as we have a clue of that later in the text.

He was a seeker of the truth

- Thirdly, this man was a seeker of the truth. Notice verse 28.

and he was returning and sitting in his chariot [or literally, coach], and was reading the prophet Isaiah.

Tradition tells us that his name was Judich. He was an African statesman of great power who had traveled about two hundred miles to Jerusalem to seek the truth. But, he had left the center of Judaism just as empty as when he had arrived. He had not found the answer he sought.

So, he is searching through the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and in a moment we will read a quote from the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint concerning this. He is pouring over the pages to fill that longing in his heart.

The Ethiopian's education enabled him to read; his scholarship enabled him to read the Greek language of the Septuagint; his executive position in the kingdom allowed him to travel to Jerusalem; his

wealth made it possible for him to buy an Isaiah scroll. I think it is interesting that he chose to purchase a copy of Isaiah. Perhaps a rabbi informed him kindly that Isaiah spoke encouragingly to eunuchs, as Isaiah did in chapter 56.

This is the man that Philip is about to encounter – flexible Philip. And do not miss the fact that Philip was never told why he was to go to a desert road; was never told how long he would be gone; was never told what to expect. He was simply told to go – and flexible Philip went.

Add a little . . . Initiative

3. A third ingredient to add to a witness for Jesus Christ is a little initiative.

Look at verse 29 of Acts, chapter 8.

Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot."

Notice that the Spirit did not ask Philip, "Do you feel comfortable knocking on chariot doors?" or, "Do you feel capable of rubbing shoulders with the political elite?" or, "Do you like confrontational evangelism or lifestyle evangelism?" or "Do you consider Ethiopian evangelism to be your spiritual gift?" No! The Spirit said, "Philip, go up and join this chariot."

At this point, I would have said, "Wait a second, Lord! I'm humble and flexible, but what did you say?"

The exciting thing about this story is that it teaches us the wonderful truth of God's sovereignty in and through evangelism.

God knew everything there was to know about this Ethiopian. He knew the man's power and prestige and also, his emptiness. God knew why he had come to Jerusalem. He had seen him being turned away from the temple. God had watched as he purchased, from some rabbi in some Synagogue, an Old Testament book and He knew which book he had purchased. He knew which passage the Ethiopian was reading at the very moment Philip arrived.

The Ethiopian was a man riding in a coach who:

- attended religious "services," or at least attempted to;
- read the scriptures;
- sought the truth;

- sincerely desired spiritual reality;
- sacrificed financially for religion's sake;
- was willing to be viewed as "different" by peers;
- accepted hardship in order to pursue his "spiritual journey";
- *was, in spite of all of this, lost and needed someone to show him the way!*

God simply needed a human agent to co-labor with Him and encounter this man in his need and present him with the truth. Have you ever been available to the Lord to be that kind of agent?

Avoid the natural inclination to be a secret service Christian; that is, "I'm a silent witness for God." A witness is called to the stand to speak. You do not plead the fifth as a follower of Christ. There is no such thing as a "mute approach," a silent approach to witnessing. Someone has to take the initiative and ask the questions.

Philip, humble, flexible Philip, is now asked to take the initiative.

"Philip, go catch a ride on that chariot."

"How?!"

"Just do it!"

Now notice verse 30a.

Philip ran up . . .

Add a little . . . Diplomacy

4. This brings us to a fourth ingredient to add to the list of those who will effectively live their lives and move their lips as a testimony for Jesus Christ, and that is, a little diplomacy.

Look at verse 30 again.

Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

Think about this for a moment. Philip is under direct orders from the Spirit of God. He could have run up and said, "Hey, you! God sent me over here to tell you how to repent, you sinner. Now give me a ride in your chariot and listen real good."

No! This verse informs us that as Philip was running up, which by the way, is an interesting proof of Philip's initiative, he heard this man reading aloud, as was the custom. Immediately, Philip tactfully

formed his first question, "Say, do you understand what you are reading?"

Philip knew the answer to that question; he knew he was out there in the desert to reach that man with the gospel. He could have said, "I bet you don't have a clue what Isaiah's talking about, do you? Well, this is your lucky day!"

Oh, the very tactfulness of his question provoked a humble response from this man. Look at verse 31.

And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Someone once defined tact as, "the ability to make someone feel at home, when you really wish they were."

Diplomacy and tact is a missing ingredient today. The church seems so troubled with its evil society that it grows frustrated and angry with it – as if it knew any other way to act. The Bible tells us, in Luke, chapter 8, verse 12, that Satan has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, lest they believe the gospel.

How do you act toward a biblically illiterate person? How do you act toward a person who asks frustrating questions?

One woman, who answered her one hundred thirty thousandth question, wrote about her comical, frustrating job as a reservations agent for a major airline,

I've made it through all the calls from adults who didn't know the difference between a.m. and p.m.; from the woman who called to get advice on how to handle her daughter; from the man who wanted to ride inside the kennel with his dog so he wouldn't have to pay for a seat; and from the woman who wanted to know why she had to change clothes on her flight between Chicago and Washington (she was told she'd have to make a change between the two cities).

In five years, I've received an education from the astonishing lack of awareness of our American citizenry. I talked to a woman in Denver who had never heard of Cincinnati; a man in Minneapolis who didn't know there was more than one city in the South; a woman in Nashville who asked if, "Instead of paying for my ticket, can I just donate the money to the National Cancer Society?"; and the man

in Dallas who tried to pay for his ticket by sticking quarters in the pay phone he was calling from.

I knew I was in trouble when a man asked if we flew to exit 35 on the New Jersey Turnpike. Another time, when a man said he wanted to fly to Illinois, and I asked him what city he wanted to go to in Illinois, and he said, "Cleveland, Ohio."

The winner was the woman who called and wanted to fly to Hippopotamus, New York. After assuring her that there as no such city, she became irate and said it was a big city with a big airport. I asked if Hippopotamus was near Albany or Syracuse. It wasn't. Then I asked if it was near Buffalo. "Buffalo!" she said, "I knew it was a big animal."

I've had 130,000 little wars and I am a wise old veteran, and I still end my calls with, "Thanks for calling, and have a nice day."

What a lesson in diplomacy. Add that to your testimony and see just how many times God will use you to help someone make a reservation in heaven.

Add a little . . . Focus

5. A fifth ingredient to add is a little focus.

Notice verses 32 through 35.

Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: "He was led as a sheep to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He does not open His mouth. In humiliation His judgment was taken away; who will relate His generation: For His life is removed from the earth." The eunuch answered Philip and said, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him.

Has it occurred to you that Philip could have really waxed eloquent about Pentecost? He had seen Jerusalem first hand in the early years after the descent of the Holy Spirit. Philip could have spent time talking to this man about his tenure as a deacon in the first church. He could have amazed the Ethiopian with his exploits as a crusade evangelist in Samaria.

No! Beginning from this Scripture, Philip preached Jesus to the Ethiopian.

And what a text – this is taken from Isaiah, chapter 53. The Ethiopian could tell from reading that the verses were referring to the violent death of someone. He asked if Isaiah was speaking of himself or of someone else.

Then Philip was able to describe for him the wonder and love of the dying Savior – the Lamb of God who came to die for the sin of the world; the Lamb who came and was silent in the acceptance of his death. He was able to tell him of Jesus, stripped before the Sanhedrin, beaten by the Romans, jeered by the mob who cried, "Crucify Him". And, that the angels, twelve legions of them, would have, at His command, come sweeping from the splendor of the Father's throne to crush the enemies of the Savior and set Him free – with just one word – but He was silent.

Philip must have explained to Judich why the Savior was silent. Jesus, the incarnation of the true and living God, had come to die for men like him.

Judich must have been filled with questions. And, if you have spent time telling people of Jesus Christ, you know that one of the challenges in witnessing is keeping that person focused on their real need. What they really need is not the answer to all the natives who have never heard the gospel or the answer concerning the age of the universe. What they need is the answer to the primary question, "What will you do with Jesus Christ?"

It is evident from the text that Philip explained not only the plan of salvation, but the identification of the believer with Christ through baptism. Look at verses 36 through 38.

As they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?" [And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."] And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.

Would you like to be like Philip? Then not only keep the witnessing focused, but add the next ingredient.

Add a little . . . Availability

6. The sixth ingredient is a little availability.

Look at verses 39 and 40.

When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.

Did you catch that, “. . . the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away . . .”? Before he could wipe the water off his face that splashed from the robes of the Ethiopian, he was whisked away; his course was changed again!

Who knows, Philip could have continued on with this Secretary of the Finance Department for the Kingdom of Ethiopia; could have begun a movement in Ethiopia; could have been the honored guest of this wealthy, powerful man; could have dined with the Queen and preached to the upper crust.

I love the way the text reads, “But,” (there is that interrupting word again – it began our story in verse 26 and now it closes our story in verse 40), “But Philip found himself at Azotus . . .”.

I wonder if he is dripping wet! I do not know about that, but I do know that he was available.

Application – Becoming Like Philip

Let me close with some thoughts of application of how to become like Philip as a witness to Jesus Christ.

Becoming like Philip is preceded by personal commitment and holiness

1. First, becoming like Philip is preceded by personal commitment and holiness.

II Timothy, chapter 2, describes the vessel that God will use for His service as a vessel that has been cleansed and sanctified. If your walk does not measure up to your talk, it is best that you do not talk.

Becoming like Philip is dependent upon selfless availability

2. Secondly, becoming like Philip is dependent upon selfless availability.

Witnessing is not so much ability as it is availability.

Becoming like Philip is expressed through personal understanding of biblical truth

3. Thirdly, becoming like Philip is expressed through a personal understanding of biblical truth.

Perhaps the reason God is not sending people your way is because you are never in His Word.

Becoming like Philip is motivated by a growing relationship with Jesus Christ

4. Finally, becoming like Philip is motivated by a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

By having a relationship with Christ and the peace of Christ that moves, that reinforces, that leads through the Word of Christ, who knows what divine opportunities we may have that we would otherwise miss.

I am making my way through a great book entitled, *Sixty Founders*. It talks about movements that have been started in the last two centuries. It is sort of a history of God’s work in America and Great Britain. Let me read a story from this book that was very interesting.

In the middle 1800’s, the popular belief in England was that children could not understand enough of theology to be genuinely converted. Children were never evangelized and the view was that they were to come and endure church until they were old enough to really understand.

A young man by the name of Payson Hammond, believed differently. He convinced a pastor in West London to let him hold special meetings for children. Friars were sent out and advertisements made. That evening the church was packed with over one thousand people. Instead of being tucked away in the gallery, the seating arrangement was reversed. The children were in the main body of the auditorium and the adults were seated in the back.

The whole service was geared to the young mind. The hymns had simple words and were set to bright and cheerful tunes. Prayers were short and couched in language children could understand and in which they could join. The preacher’s informal methods

caught the children's interest as he spoke to them simply of the gospel. Abandoning the pulpit, Hammond stood on a platform to speak to his young audience. He told stories that were interesting. He even asked them questions making the Bible teaching clear and appealing. And after the last hymn, he invited children to stay behind for counseling – another innovation – and many of them that evening, professed faith in Christ.

The response by the adults, both within the church and outside, was criticism of his method. Believing that it was “dangerous to encourage children to make a decision for Christ”. Others accused him of “playing on the emotions of children” and of “sensationalism”.

Nevertheless, Hammond preached at the church in this manner for four straight evenings. Hundreds of children made decisions for Christ.

That week sparked a movement that to this day, is known as Scripture Union and it

reaches into more than one hundred countries. Its mission statement simply says, “We desire to bring God's Word to a young world.”

I wonder if God would bring people across our path so that we could become the agent, the messenger of this life giving gospel? What does it take for that to happen in our lives? Well, let us add these elements: humility, flexibility, initiative, diplomacy, the right focus, and most of all, availability.

By the way, the Ethiopian must have become a lot like Philip. Through church history, we discover that years later, the first major national movement of the organized New Testament church, where great church leaders rose up and lead the way for generations, was not in Asia Minor, not in Europe, but in North Africa. Iranius, the church father, says that Judich went back to Ethiopia so changed that he began a movement.

If we add these elements to our lives, by the grace of God, He may indeed use us to win even one soul or He may use us to start a movement. May God use you and me to win people for His glory.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/23/1997 by Stephen Davey.

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