

Gifted *for* Service: Philip



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 6:3; Acts 8; Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:1–11, 27–31; 1 Tim. 3:8–12.*

Memory Text: “And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did” (*Acts 8:6*).

Key Thought: Through Philip's ministry, Samaria is turned upside down by the good news, and an influential Gentile Ethiopian comes to Jesus. When we surrender our lives to God, there is no limit to what He may choose to do through us to advance His kingdom.

Feeling persecution, confronting a sorcerer, casting out demons, healing those crippled and paralyzed, converting a rich Ethiopian from the royal court, being physically transported long distances by the Holy Spirit—life for Philip was anything but dull.

When many people think of Christianity, they picture long sermons in church, lists of do's and don'ts, and bored-looking people with long faces. These stereotypes, of course, could not be further from the truth. Following Jesus is the most exciting life possible.

For example, this week we will be looking at the exciting life and mission of Philip, a man whose world took on a totally new dimension when he was ordained for service. Chosen as one of the seven deacons for the early church, Philip took a course he could never have predicted. He personally shared the good news of Jesus in Samaria and, indirectly, with the continent of Africa.

What can we learn from his story?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 20.*

Called to Service

The church in Jerusalem chose Philip and six other men to serve as deacons, or servants. The Greek word translated here as deacon, *diakonos*, is translated as servant in other parts of the New Testament (in the King James Version and many other translations). Speaking to the crowds and to His disciples, Jesus said, “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant [or your deacon]” (*Matt. 23:11*). And in predicting His death, He said, “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant [or deacon] be” (*John 12:26*).

Read Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8–12. From these scriptures, what assumptions can we make about the character of Philip?

Read Acts 2:46, 47; 4:32, 33. What kind of picture do these texts present of the church at that time?

The good times did not last, however. Eventually, a major crisis arose (*see Acts 6:1*). Although at this stage almost all the new believers were Jewish, there were two major types of Jews: the Grecian Jews, who were not born in Israel, spoke Greek, and approached things from a Greek cultural outlook; and the Hebraic Jews, who spoke Aramaic and/or Hebrew, and their worldview was strictly Jewish. As the church grew rapidly, the Grecian Jews complained that when food was distributed, their widows were overlooked in favor of those of the Hebraic Jews.

Faced with their first major problem from within the community, the 12 apostles met together and implemented one of the key strategies of good leadership: delegation. The role of deacon was created.

How much time does your local church waste dealing with members fighting among themselves? How can you help the local church direct its energy toward reaching the lost?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Acts 8:6*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: The history and contribution of Philip to the rise and progress of the early church.

Feel: An affinity to Philip and his mission.

Do: Resolve to do ministry as Philip carried out his.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Philip the Evangelist (*Acts 8:6*)

A Evangelism is a specific spiritual gift (*Eph. 4:11*) given by the Holy Spirit.

B Philip is an outstanding New Testament example of an evangelist.

C Emphasize to the class, however, that not all Christians are evangelists, but all Christians are witnesses.

II. Call to Discipleship (*John 12:26*)

A All Christians are also called to discipleship.

B Discipleship means a person becomes available, willing, accountable, and responsible in the cause of the Lord.

C Have your class identify these aspects of discipleship in Paul's calling in Acts 9.

D How can your class witness in an effective way even though few members may be called as evangelists?

E Have the class devise a specific outreach plan (if you don't already have one) that they can put into practice as a class unit.

► **Summary:** Philip provides another powerful example of what God can do through somebody who has dedicated his or her life to Him.

Missionary to Samaria

When Philip reappears in the biblical record, we find him in Samaria, the area north of Judea. Jesus had predicted that His followers would become missionaries not only in Jerusalem but “ ‘in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’ ” (*Acts 1:8, NIV*). Now Philip is part of the fulfillment of this prophecy but perhaps not in the way he and the other believers would have predicted.

The leaders did not send Philip to Samaria as a missionary. He was not part of the early church’s Global Mission plan to reach unentered areas.

Read *Acts 8:1–5*. **What events caused Philip to flee to Samaria? What did the scattered believers do when they fled?**

After the stoning of Stephen, Saul’s persecution of the Christian church grew stronger, and all the believers, except the 12 apostles, scattered. This is the first example we see in history of the underground church. Many times since then we have seen God’s faithful followers driven into hiding for their faith. Even today, in many parts of the world, Adventist believers are forced to worship in secret.

As they scattered, these believers “preached the word wherever they went” (*Acts 8:4, NIV*). **Ironically, persecution ensured that the good news spread more widely. What other examples of this happening can you think of?**

This was a terrible time for the early Christians—forced from home, scattered to foreign areas, living in fear of further attacks. Philip was the father of four daughters, and no doubt this would have been a stressful time for his family (*Acts 21:9*). And yet, despite their difficult circumstances, Philip and the other Christian believers continued to share the good news of Jesus faithfully.

Despite the trials, the believers worked hard to spread the message. Why? Because they had a sense of mission, of purpose. Why are so many of us lacking that same sense of mission? Could it be because we are too busy looking inward and not outward, too busy thinking of our own needs and not the needs of a lost world? Think about this and be prepared to discuss your thoughts on Sabbath.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Ironically, *The Good Shepherd* is the title of a 2006 motion picture about a fictional American who helps start the Central Intelligence Agency, a spy service that may have reached its apex during the Cold War between America and the former Soviet Union. The life portrayed is one of substance and shadow, disguises and deceptions, all packed with drama.

For a life of intrigue, suspense, and thrills, however, you don't have to look much farther than Philip, plucked from the ranks of day-to-day church members in Jerusalem, first to help serve meals, then to break the bread of life to others. His ministry crossed deserts, was carried (by others) into Africa, and even touched the "untouchable" land of Samaria. Philip "got around" and brought hope and help to people in need. His active partner was God the Holy Spirit, and the results were something to behold.

Philip was a good shepherd of the people he served, but, of course, he wasn't the "Good Shepherd" that Jesus was. However, Philip's readiness to tackle new projects and difficult tasks is one we would do well to emulate. There are people waiting!


► **STEP 2**—Explore

Bible Commentary

I. A Gift With a Purpose (*Review Acts 6:3, 8; Rom. 12:6–8 with your class.*)

You've seen this on television perhaps, or heard about it, or possibly have witnessed it in your community: a "preacher" or "healer" comes to town, sets up an elaborate meeting, and proceeds to "cure" those who have serious, sometimes life-threatening diseases. But after the event is over, those who have been "healed" find that it was a temporary phenomenon at best.

When God truly gives a spiritual gift to someone, He does it for a specific purpose—not for show. Philip received his spiritual gifts to accomplish the work of evangelism; signs and wonders were needed in the early church to confirm the message. Today, God still equips those He calls, but with the gifts suited to the immediate task.

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Opportunities for Witness

As Adventists we often speak of finding an entering wedge for our mission. In many places we cannot, because of prejudice, immediately start speaking about Jesus or the Bible. People often put up barriers as soon as we start talking about spiritual things. The health message often has broken down barriers in many parts of the world. Personal friendship is perhaps the most effective entering wedge. When we become friends with people, they often start to ask us about our Christian beliefs.

Read Acts 8:26–39, the story of Philip and the eunuch, and then answer the following questions:

1 What prompted Philip to go where and when he did? What important message is there for us in your answer?

2 What entering wedge did Philip use in order to start witnessing to this person? That is, what need did he help fulfill for the eunuch? What important lesson can we take away from this, as well?

3 What was required of the eunuch in order for him to be baptized? What message can we take away from this for ourselves?

The Ethiopian had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and the chances are that he was returning disappointed. He would have quickly discovered that, as a Gentile and as a eunuch, he was doubly disqualified from worshiping in the court of the Jews (*see Deut. 23:1*).

Now, new light breaks through his discouragement as he learns of the One who, through His death, has “broken down the middle wall of partition” (*Eph. 2:14*). In response to the wonderful news he hears, the eunuch asks Philip to baptize him. And here we read of the first recorded Gentile convert to Christianity—a wealthy and powerful African.

How often do you have opportunities to witness for your faith? How well do you use those opportunities? What could you do better?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Consider This: Philip also prepared himself, through diligent service and worship, to receive God’s call and God’s gifts. What can we do to be ready to answer a call, and what preparations can we help others make?

II. Service Specified

Consider This: Philip was called to service in a new church job—deacon—because of the needs of a growing congregation. What roles does your church see developing as it grows or changes?


Less than ten years after the birth of the group that was to organize itself as the Seventh-day Adventist Church, our pioneers recognized that young people and others needed training in the ways of God that extended beyond a sermon or lecture.

“In 1853—only a few years after the first group of Sabbathkeeping Adventists was formed in Washington, New Hampshire—James White, one of the founders of the Adventist Church, organized the first regular Sabbath School in Rochester, [New York],” stated a September 30, 2003, Adventist News Network article entitled “150 Years of Sabbath School Celebrated Where It All Began.”

Consider This: Are there innovations we can consider that will help us to serve others in our church—in the world church as a whole?

III. I Was Led of the Lord (*Review Acts 8:26–39 with your class.*)

We read earlier of Philip’s preparation for service. It wasn’t intentional, he didn’t attend the “early church school of theology and ministry,” but it was preparation nonetheless. Now we see that he was able to be used of God to reach a key government official and introduce the Christian faith to an

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Gifted for Service

Each of us as followers of Christ is given spiritual gifts to accomplish the mission God has for us. Spiritual gifts were vital in the life of the early Christian church and fired the missionary zeal of the new believers. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers and told them that he did not want them to be ignorant about spiritual gifts (*1 Cor. 12:1*). The Greek word Paul uses for gifts, *charismata*, emphasizes that these are gifts of grace—totally unearned by us.

The fifth fundamental belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit, says: “He extends spiritual gifts to the church.” This is an important concept. Although the gifts are given through the believer, they are really gifts for the church.

Spiritual gifts are never given merely for the benefit and edification of individual believers. They are always given in the context of mission and service. Spiritual gifts are given to believers in the context of the wider church community, so they can benefit the church in its mission to the world.

The account of Philip’s experience in Samaria (*Acts 8:4–8*) is not detailed. At some stage God gave him extra spiritual gifts, and he changed from Philip the deacon to Philip the evangelist. It must have been a significant step for Philip to go from administering the church in Jerusalem to casting out demons and healing the sick in Samaria.

The two main biblical sources for our understanding of spiritual gifts come from Romans 12:6–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:1–11, 27–31. Read these passages and compare with Acts 8:4–8. What spiritual gifts did Philip display, and how did he use them?

“When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said” (*Acts 8:6, NIV*). Even if we are not able to perform miracles, as did Philip, what principle is seen here? What is it about us, our lives, our teachings, that would cause anyone to pay close attention to what we say?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

entire nation!

No one knows the destinations, or destinies, God has in store for us in this life. However, with planning and an open heart, we can be led to places we never thought we'd go and to people who need Him!

► **STEP 3—Practice**

Thought Questions:

1 What was the “seed” that blossomed into a new role within the church—and a new leader for the nascent movement? How does this translate to our day—are there needs we can help fill creatively?

2 We read of miraculous occurrences in the life of Philip. But miracles are happening today all over the world as God’s good news is shared by Adventist Christians every day. What are some of today’s miracles that you’ve seen or heard about?


Application Questions:

1 Does service belong only to the pastor? The head elder? A select group of people? Or does service, and witnessing, belong to every member of the church? How can you better serve the brethren and your community?

2 Philip prepared himself by serving. When the opportunity arose, God the Holy Spirit selected and equipped him. How can we model Philip’s quality of service and where can we best serve others?

Witnessing

It’s wonderful to have ambitions and a desire to improve your situation

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Philip and Simon Magus

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard of the tremendous success in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to visit Philip and the new believers. They both arrived in Samaria at a providential time to support Philip. They first prayed for the new believers to receive the Holy Spirit—something that, apparently, Philip had not done. Then they helped Philip deal with a former sorcerer named Simon.

Read Acts 8:9–25, the story of Simon, Philip, Peter, and John, and then answer the following questions:

1 Why are miracles and other supernatural manifestations not absolute proof that God is directly behind what is happening?

2 Simon wanted the right thing, just in the wrong way, or so it seemed. (After all, what is wrong with wanting to bestow the Holy Spirit on others?) Judging by Peter’s reaction, what might have been the true motive for Simon’s request?

3 In what way was Peter’s reaction to Simon similar to Jesus’ reaction to Peter? *Matt. 16:21–27.*

4 Where do we see, in this section, the grace of Christ and the gospel of forgiveness?

No matter how gifted Philip was, even he needed help, which explains why Peter and John came. The important point is, no one is good enough or gifted enough to do the work of the Lord alone. We all need the help of others.

Wanting to buy the power to bestow the Holy Spirit? Come on! Yet, Simon was said to be a believer, and he was even baptized. What kind of foolish things did you once believe early in your walk with God that you now know better about? How could this help you be more tolerant of those who, in their ignorance, might be holding foolish beliefs, as well?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

in life. That's what education and hard work can help anyone accomplish. But along the way, don't forget to help others, both by instruction and by service. As is often said, "People won't care about how much you know, until they know how much you care!"

► STEP 4—Apply

Philip's story is fascinating, exciting, and, as we've said, miraculous. But it's not one we often go to when considering the great heroes of the Bible. Philip isn't of royal heritage, he never bested a giant, and there's no book of the New Testament that bears his name.

Yet, even the "everyday" people, such as Philip, can be mightily used by God. It wasn't Peter or James or Paul who was sent to a top national leader from Ethiopia, it was the "deacon," or "servant," named Philip!

Consider This: "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong" (*1 Cor. 1:26, 27, NIV*).

The pioneering founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were not listed in any social register of the prominent and powerful. Ellen White was barely out of her teens; her husband, James, an itinerant school-teacher; and Joseph Bates was a weather-beaten old sea captain. Yet, these people had a passion to know God's will and to obey His commands. Because they were teachable and submitted to God, the movement they helped found has grown tremendously.

Today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a global reach far beyond anything the pioneers saw in their lifetimes. In 2006, some 15 million were baptized members and at least another 10 million worshiped with those members every week. Our global network of schools, colleges, universities, and hospitals has made the name Adventist recognized for quality work around the globe.

It all started, though, with a band of "ordinary" people who were committed to God's Word. Just think where your commitment can lead!

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Gospel in Samaria,” pp. 103–111, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“In this instance we have an illustration of the care of God for his children. He called Philip from his successful ministry in Samaria, to cross the desert and go to Gaza to labor for a single inquiring soul. The promptness with which the eunuch accepted the gospel and acted upon its belief should be a lesson to us. God designs that we should be prompt in accepting and confessing Christ, prompt in obeying him, and in answering the call of duty. The eunuch was a man of good repute, and occupied a high and responsible position. Through his conversion the gospel was carried to Ethiopia, and many there accepted Christ, and came out from the darkness of heathenism into the clear light of Christianity.”—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 305.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** As a class, talk about your answer to Monday’s final question. In fact, before you do that, it would be better to discuss your answer to Sunday’s question.
- 2** Early on in the Lord’s church, ethnic divisions arose. Even today, in various parts of the world, similar tensions exist among church members. What about in your own local church? How can you as an individual help your church see just how contrary to every principle of the gospel these attitudes are?
- 3** Philip baptized the eunuch immediately after he accepted Jesus as his Savior. Why does the Adventist Church not do the same today? Should or should we not? Justify your answer.
- 4** What are some of the needs in your community that your church could use as an entering wedge in order to reach people with the gospel of Christ? How could you help your church in the crucial area of outreach?

Summary: Philip provides another powerful example of what God can do through somebody who has dedicated his or her life to Him. Whether witnessing to the eunuch, sharing with the Gentiles in Samaria, or converting Simon the sorcerer, Philip’s one goal was to uphold the name of Jesus.