

**STUDY GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS**  
***SPIRIT-FILLED LIVING***

Week 6: Week of October 27

" Unexpected Opportunity, Unexpected Grace"

Text: Acts 8:26-40

**(For Facilitators mainly - optional for the group)**

Throughout Acts, there are key themes that continue to present themselves over and over again. Those themes are as follows:

- i. The leading of the Holy Spirit
- ii. The spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth
- iii. Ministering to unlikely people
- iv. Preaching the good news of Jesus Christ
- v. Baptizing new believers

All five themes are depicted in this particular story of Philip and the Ethiopian.

- Remember in Acts 1:8 Jesus tells his disciples, *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* Then from Acts 2-8, we see how the Spirit moves into thousands of converts and through the apostles into people with various circumstances. While Jesus' Spirit-filled followers encounter growing hostility, not even that hostility to the gospel and those who proclaim it can stop the Spirit from spreading into more and more people.
- However, with the death of Stephen in chapter 6, we see that hostility has turned to violence. Real persecution began with Stephen's subsequent execution (8:1). But that didn't stop the disciples from spreading the gospel. Rather it sends them out from Jerusalem (remember 1:8?) through Judea and Samaria.
- Those who are aware of the historic tension between the Jews and Samaritans may be surprised by Philip's sharing the gospel in Samaria. They're probably even more startled by the positive effect his, as well as Peter and John's proclamation has in Samaria. That witness, after all, fills that city with "great joy" (8:8).
- Acts 8:25 suggests that the Spirit sends Peter and John from Samaria back to Jerusalem, verse 26 reports that the Spirit sends Philip even farther into the Samaritan "hinterlands." In fact, it's so far "out there" that Martin Marty compares the end of its highway to one of those gas stations at the edge of a desert whose sign reads: "Last gas for 150 miles ..." To paraphrase an old cliché, if where the Spirit sends Philip isn't the

end of the world, you can almost see it from there. (i.e. He can see Russia from his house - lol).

- The man whom Philip meets out in the middle of nowhere may be almost as far “out there” as their meeting place. Acts 8:16 reports, after all, that the man is Ethiopian. Dr. Will Willimon calls “a person from an exotic land, the edge of the world, timbuktu, someone whose dark skin makes him an object of wonder and admiration among Jews and Romans” (Acts: John Knox Press, p. 72).
- Here, the story of the early church and the unfolding of God’s salvation plan begin a new path. To this point, the good news of Jesus has been preached to crowds, and conversion has happened en mass. Now, we see how God uses Philip the Evangelist to save one man—and not any man but an Ethiopian eunuch, with dark skin, from a land far away, and physically maimed in such a way that even though he fears the Lord, he can never enter the temple courts to worship in his presence.
- The Ethiopian eunuch’s devotions include Isaiah 53’s well-known words about a suffering servant whom people unjustly torture and slaughter. While most Christians have come to see this as a prophecy about Jesus the Christ, the Ethiopian hasn’t. He recognizes that he needs help if he’s to understand what he’s reading. Philip chooses to focus on the way Isaiah points ahead to Jesus. He uses Isaiah 53 as a stepping-stone to a gospel presentation about the good news of God’s grace received through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Luke’s account demonstrates that God will position each of us to reveal his glory. The Ethiopian eunuch shows us that no matter our background, God will answer the questions of those who ask with a humble and sincere heart. And most importantly, through the power of the Holy Spirit with the good news of Jesus Christ, God will radically save the unlikely.
- The Spirit continues to stretch out towards the ends of the earth that God so deeply loves. Even into places of deep division, hostility and violence.
- A word on Isaiah 53 from NT Wright... *the prophet Isaiah had meditated on the fate of Israel in exile and on the promises and purposes of God, which remained constant despite Israel's failure to be the light to the nations or even to walk in the light itself. A picture took shape: a Servant who would complete Israel's task, who would come to where Israel was and do for Israel and for the whole world what neither could do for themselves. Now Philip announced that Jesus was that Servant. No wonder the Ethiopian wanted to share in the death and resurrection of this Jesus by being baptized. When you tell the story of Israel like that, with Jesus at its climax, it opens up to include everybody, including people like him, doubly excluded and now wonderfully welcomed.*

## Discussion Questions

Opening Questions (optional).

1. What different circles or networks of people are you part of, and how did you become connected to them?
2. What experience have you had being mentored or tutored or mentoring others?

Read Acts 8:26-40 and Isaiah 53

1. In looking at the five themes of the book of Acts, which one would you like to learn more about? Which one really resonates with you and why?
2. What's troubling the Ethiopian?
3. In what ways does Jesus fit the picture of the one described in Isaiah 53?
4. What are the outcomes of the conversation along the road?
5. Given that Jesus' followers were now being persecuted, why is this story even more significant?
6. Who do you relate more to, Philip or the Ethiopian? Or what part of Philip's character do you relate to and what part of the Ethiopian's character do you relate to? Why?
7. What do people today find puzzling in the scriptures? What kind of topics have come up for you?
8. Have you ever been invited to share the gospel with someone? What was that like for you? Or, have you ever invited someone to help you understand the scriptures or someone to share about their faith with you? What was that like and what was the result?
9. Do you think of yourself as an evangelist? Why or why not?
10. Where might you want to grow in being able to share the gospel with someone? What is keeping you from doing so? What are you wanting to change?
11. How might God be calling you to be a witness?