



LISTEN WELL TO SHARE JESUS

ACTS 8:21-40
LESSON 5

MAIN POINT

It is the job of every believer to faithfully do the work of the Great Commission and sow seeds wherever God allows.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What has been your favorite experience sharing the gospel? What has been your least favorite?

Since we're commanded to share the story of Jesus with others, why do we often avoid the task?

What do we learn about God from His desire to be known and to use us to make His name known?

Like a farmer who scatters seeds on a plot of land, we sow the seeds of the gospel into the field of the world. Sometimes the seeds we plant take root and bear fruit, but it is the job of every believer to faithfully do the work of the Great Commission and sow seeds wherever God allows.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what God's Word says and means for us.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ACTS 8:1-4.

What happened to the church in the event of Stephen's execution? What effect do you think this had on the early believers? Where did they go to escape the persecution?

Read Acts 1:8. What is the connection between Jesus' command and the events of Acts 8:1-4?

According to verse 4, what effect did the persecution and scattering of the early church have on the believers' faith? What can we learn from their example?

Events surrounding Stephen's testimony and murder led to severe persecution of the church in Jerusalem. The disciples were likely scared and feared for their lives, but God used their distress for the cause of the gospel. All believers except the apostles were scattered to nearby regions. Stephen's death became a catalyst for the spread of the gospel to places it had not gone previously.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ACTS 8:5-8.

Why were the Samaritans attentive to Philip? What actions did he perform? How did these acts validate his ministry?

In verse 8, what was the result of Philip's faithfulness? How could the Lord use you, if you went outside your comfort zone to share the gospel?

Popular opinion held that Samaritans were second-class citizens, a mixed race of Jews and foreigners who inhabited the land after the Assyrian conquest (2 Kings 17:24), and who were unclean and unfit for worship in the temple. Their "uncleanness" was thought to be passed through physical contact, so most Jews avoided them entirely. Philip's faithfulness resulted in gospel fruit and indicated that old biases had no place in Christianity, which is something Jesus Himself modeled. Philip's performing these acts gave evidence that early believers were continuing their Lord's ministry and validated believers' work as Christ's work.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ACTS 8:9-25.

In verses 9-13, what do you learn about Simon the magician? How does he respond to Philip's message?

How does the church in Jerusalem respond to the news of the gospel spreading to Samaria? Why was it important that the established church sent people to evaluate God's work in a new place?

How did Simon the magician respond to the apostles? What does this teach you about the genuineness of his belief?

The real benefit of the gospel is a relationship with Jesus Christ. Simon the magician did not see it that way. Rather, he was impressed by the power and signs done by Philip and

the apostles and sought to acquire this blessing by financial means. We should not be dissuaded from continuing to share as the apostles themselves continued to do on their way out of Samaria (v 25).

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ACTS 8:26-35.

How would you describe Philip's response to the Spirit's directive? What does this tell us about him?

What do we learn about the Ethiopian man in verses 27-28? How did Philip take advantage of this special situation?

What might have happened if Philip was unprepared to talk about Scripture or unfamiliar with the Isaiah prophecy? What does this tell us about the connection between personal discipleship and missions?

Philip was a faithful man. When God called him to serve the church in Acts 6:5, he obeyed. He responded with the same quick obedience in 8:26 as he left his successful ministry in Samaria at the angel's instruction. As a result, the Lord used Philip powerfully in the life of the Ethiopian man. Providentially, Philip found the man reading a passage of Scripture that very clearly referred to Jesus. Philip was able to use this passage of Scripture to explain the gospel to the Ethiopian man. Philip's faithfulness and attention to discipleship gave the Lord an avenue to work through Him to reach someone who was far from Christ.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ACTS 8:36-40.

What did the man's question in verse 36 convey? How does this reflect a changed heart?

What does verse 40 teach us about Philip's continued faithfulness?

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Consider the example of Philip and the eunuch. Are there people you have neglected to share the gospel with because they are different than you?

What places in Scripture might you turn to teach another person about the gospel? Have you considered memorizing these passages?

How could your story be an encouragement to others? With whom will you share your testimony and invite to Sunday School next week?

PRAYER

Pray that God would use all the circumstances in your life to share His gospel and offer Him glory.

COMMENTARY

ACTS 8:1-40

8:1. The facts that the apostles were not the focus of the persecution and that it came about after Stephen's death suggest that the persecution focused primarily on Hellenistic Jewish Christians, although the entire church was affected.

8:3. Paul, or Saul, seems to have become lead persecutor. His reputation as a destructive force in Jerusalem (ravaging the church), and possibly elsewhere, seems to have preceded him to Damascus (9:13).

8:5. Among those who scattered with the heightened persecution was Philip, who went to a city in Samaria. This territory near Judea was made up of those who had not left under the Assyrian exile and had intermarried with non-Jews. Jews generally looked down on Samaria; ministry here was a significant step for the church, for it indicated that old biases had no place in Christianity.

8:6-7. The signs that accompanied Philip's message about Jesus, including the casting out of unclean spirits and the healing of many who were paralyzed and lame, ensured that the audience paid attention with one mind. God was vouching for Philip's preaching.

8:9. Simon the magician (Simon Magus), who practiced sorcery in Samaria, was well-known in post-apostolic Christianity as a heretic and proto-Gnostic.

8:10. The term "Great Power of God" reflects pagan language.

8:13. Even Simon was one of those who believed the good news presented by Philip. The authenticity of his belief is doubtful. He seems to have been fixated on the signs and miracles that accompanied Philip's preaching, not the person of Jesus Christ.

8:17. Early converts received the Holy Spirit at the laying on of hands by apostles or evangelists. Some suggest that this was God's plan to ensure that new believers received trustworthy instruction and got connected to God's chosen apostolic leaders.

8:18-19. Here we see Simon's true heart. He was used to impressing the crowds with magic; now he wanted to impress them with his ability to impart the Holy Spirit.

8:20-22. By saying that Simon had no part or share in this matter, Peter confirmed that Simon had not truly converted to Christianity. His heart (meaning his will, affections, allegiance) was still not right before God.

8:25. After several episodes in Samaria, Peter, Philip, and any other apostles traveling with them returned to Jerusalem. They evangelized many villages of the Samaritans along the way, tearing down ethnic barriers with the global gospel of Jesus Christ.

8:26-40. An angel directed Philip to go to the road that led from Jerusalem to Gaza (v. 26). Philip obeyed and encountered an Ethiopian eunuch returning home from worshiping in Jerusalem (vv. 27-28). Philip seized the opportunity to proclaim the good news about salvation in Jesus (vv. 29-35). The eunuch responded positively, and Philip baptized him (vv. 36-38). The Spirit took Philip away, but the eunuch continued his journey home, elated at finding Christ (v. 39). Philip preached in the coastal cities of the Mediterranean Sea on the way to Caesarea (v. 40).

8:29. An angel instructed Philip to leave Samaria and travel south to the road that led to Gaza on the route to Egypt. There God would provide him a special situation. Philip immediately obeyed, and on the road to Gaza he met an Ethiopian eunuch, the treasurer of Candace, queen of Ethiopia (v. 27). Ethiopia was an area south of Egypt. The eunuch was returning home after worshiping in Jerusalem. The term “eunuch” could refer to a man who had been castrated or could mean “treasurer.” He was a God-fearer, a worshiper of the one true God; but if he had been deprived of his manhood, then his physical condition prevented him from converting to Judaism. He may have been attracted to Judaism’s moral and ethical teachings. In his chariot he was reading from a large scroll, from a portion of the prophet Isaiah.

This eunuch was a high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, and was in charge of her entire treasury. Candace is the hereditary title for all the queens of Ethiopia. The eunuch was sitting in his chariot, perhaps an ox-drawn wagon.

8:30-31. Philip’s question and the Ethiopian’s response imply that the OT passage the eunuch was reading (Isa 53:7-8) required interpretation in light of what God had done through Jesus of Nazareth. The eunuch’s response to Philip’s question was suggestive: “How can I . . . unless someone guides me?” This question underscores a prominent theme in Luke-Acts: the need for Christian interpreters of Old Testament prophetic texts. Jesus had done this for the apostles (see Luke 24:44-45); in turn, they had interpreted Old Testament texts for the Jews in Jerusalem.

8:32-34. The Ethiopian was reading Isaiah 53:7-8, apparently from the Greek text. It is likely that he was reading the entire Suffering Servant section of Isaiah (52:13-53:12). The eunuch’s question, “Who is the prophet saying this about?” allowed Philip to explain Jesus as the subject of the passage. It is Jesus, not Isaiah, who suffered for the sins of humanity (Isa 53:6). From the earliest days of the church, the Suffering Servant section has been seen as an ideal starting place for explaining the gospel.

8:35. Philip’s words were good news to the eunuch, for he was included in the gospel and had access to God’s grace in Christ. Although he could not be accepted as a Jewish convert, he would be accepted by God if he placed his faith in Christ. After Philip explained Isaiah 53:7-8, he moved to other passages that pointed to Jesus, probably using such texts as Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-5; 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-11; and 52:13, 53:12.

8:38-40. The Ethiopian requested and was granted baptism just as soon as he believed. That they went into the water and then came up out of the water apparently indicates baptism by immersion. The Spirit miraculously carried Philip away, for the eunuch came “up out of the water” and found himself alone. The Holy Spirit had taken Philip to his next appointment, a place called Azotus.