

The Power of Your Story

Just Give 'Em Jesus

Acts 8:4-13, 26-40

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Text Introduction: We are in a series of messages on the Power of Story—not just any story, but the story of God’s activity in our lives. We are examining New Testament stories of individuals sharing their story. We want to specifically see what God would teach us from these stories about sharing our own story. So far, we have considered the story of Nicodemus coming to Jesus at night, the example of John the Baptist, the example of the very first disciples of Jesus, and last week the woman at the well, a blind man, and a man delivered from demons. I’ve been telling you that you need to tell your story and others need to hear your story. Today, we examine a story that is, I believe, the clearest example of how God can use one individual to talk to another individual about Christ. It’s the story of Philip in Acts 8.

Text: ⁴ So those who were scattered went on their way preaching the message of good news. ⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. ⁶ The crowds paid attention with one mind to what Philip said, as they heard and saw the signs he was performing. ⁷ For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed, and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

⁹ A man named Simon had previously practiced sorcery in that city and astounded the Samaritan people, while claiming to be somebody great. ¹⁰ They all paid attention to him, from the least of them to the greatest, and they said, “This man is called the Great Power of God!” ¹¹ They were attentive to him because he had astounded them with his sorceries for a long time. ¹² But when they believed Philip, as he preached the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. ¹³ Then even Simon himself believed. And after he was baptized, he went around constantly with Philip and was astounded as he observed the signs and great miracles that were being performed.

²⁶ An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip: “Get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is the desert road.) ²⁷ So he got up and went. There was an Ethiopian man, a eunuch and high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to worship in Jerusalem ²⁸ and was sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading the prophet Isaiah aloud.

²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go and join that chariot.”

³⁰ When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you’re reading?”

³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone guides me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the Scripture passage he was reading was this:

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb is silent before its shearer,
so He does not open His mouth.

³³ In His humiliation justice was denied Him.

Who will describe His generation?

For His life is taken from the earth.

³⁴ The eunuch replied to Philip, “I ask you, who is the prophet saying this about—himself or another person?” ³⁵ So Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning from that Scripture.

³⁶ As they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, “Look, there’s water! What would keep me from being baptized?” [³⁷ And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart you may.” And he replied, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”] ³⁸ Then he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer. But he went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip appeared in Azotus, and he was traveling and evangelizing all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Introduction: Sometimes, we must preach Christ to the masses. That is certainly communicated in the beginning of chapter 8. The opening verses of this text tell us that the first Church was experiencing persecution. As a result of this persecution, the believers in Jesus Christ were scattered. Verse four indicates that those scattered went everywhere preaching Christ. The persecution could not stop them from preaching Christ. In fact, the persecution strengthened their preaching. In verse five, the text tells us that Philip went to Samaria and preached to the multitudes. This is the same Philip, we believe, who is listed as a deacon in chapter six of Acts. Interesting, isn’t it, that the attention in this text is given to the layperson not the apostles? The text implies that many believed as a result of this preaching to the masses.

However, the work of delivering the Gospel to those who need to hear is not accomplished only through the preaching to masses. We have already examined in recent weeks that the Gospel more efficiently advances by one on one sharing. This text is one of the clearest in all of the New Testament to help us to identify some principles of how this works, especially in regards to the person who God uses.

The Person God Uses:

God uses those who are looking to be used.

Notice these four characteristics of Philip that give indication of his willingness and preparation to be used by God.

- Servant—We first meet Philip back in Acts 6, when he is chosen to be one of the deacons of the early church. Remember the list of qualifications prescribed for this ministry: “men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty.” The duty was one of servanthood. Long before Philip was declaring the truth about Jesus, he was proving himself as a servant of Jesus Christ. He was looking to be used.

- Scattered—Philip was one those scattered. The importance of the scattering is that they were preaching the good news about Jesus. This speaks to me about their intentionality to share the good news about Jesus. We have to be intentional.
- Sensitive to the Holy Spirit—The clearest principle in this story is Philip’s sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and the Spirit’s work in bringing this Ethiopian official to faith.

First, the Spirit of God *scattered* the Church throughout the region. Then, the Spirit of God *spoke* to the heart of Philip and *sent* him to a specific location to intercept the Ethiopian. Then, God *set up* the Ethiopian riding in the chariot by having him read from the prophet Isaiah. The point is that the Spirit of God is continually at work. We can be certain that God is at work drawing people to Himself. This fact ought to give us great enthusiasm and great confidence as we seek to reach the world one person at a time.

- Knowledgeable of the Scriptures—Philip started with Isaiah and proceeded from that Scripture to tell the man about Jesus. This ability is developed through our own reading of Scripture. We must be prepared. I am bothered when I hear people, who have been believers for a long period of time, indicate that they are fearful that they don’t know Scripture well enough to talk to others about faith. If we are looking to be used by God, we will work on getting prepared. We know that God uses His word to draw people to Himself, so let’s give attention to His Word.

God uses those who lift up Jesus.

Consider the contrast between Philip and Simon in this text. Simon pointed people to Simon; Philip pointed people to Jesus. I want to caution us that we always point people to Christ. The truth is that it is easier to point people to the Church than it is Christ, but the Church didn’t die for people’s sins. We have been saying “tell your story.” Please understand though, that your story is only the launching pad to bring the story of Christ. Our story is the connection point to Christ. This commitment to point them to Jesus always will come from the conviction that people ultimately need Jesus.

Watergate figure Charles Colson was first exposed to the Gospel by Tom Phillips who was the President of Raytheon, one of the largest corporations in America in 1973. Colson recounted the events this way: “I remember the first day I walked into the executive suite of Tom Phillips in 1973. I had not seen him in four years. Within minutes it was obvious that he was a changed man -- kind, compassionate, caring about me.

“When I pressed him about, what had happened he replied, ‘I have accepted Jesus Christ and committed my life to him.’ It was said as matter-of-factly as he might have described the plate of ham and eggs he had eaten for breakfast. I was stunned at the strange sounding words I had never heard before. Yet that bold witness led me later to make a similar decision which radically transformed my life.

“Tom told me later that he had prayed the night before our scheduled meeting. The answer he seemed to get was; ‘Tell Chuck Colson about me; he needs a friend.’ This was not easy for Tom Phillips. His natural reserve rebelled against any outward show of religiosity. He knew nothing about the inner hollowness in my own life that I had experienced since election night, 1972. I had disguised my torment well.

“Tom had carefully rehearsed what he would say. But the next day when I walked into his office,

seemingly proud and confident, he suddenly felt timid, fearing that I might think him some sort of religious fanatic. He took several deep breaths and found an opportunity to make his statement of faith. When I failed to respond positively he was dismayed, convinced he had failed.

“To this day I wonder what might have happened if Phillips at that critical moment had flinched and ignored what seemed to be God’s clear call. Neither of us in our wildest dreams could have imagined what would follow from that one moment in the spring of 1973.”¹

God uses those who make sharing Him a lifestyle.

There’s one last truth in this text. Primary to the end of this story is that Philip did not stop with the one Ethiopian. In fact, the summary of his life is that he continued.

We only encounter the name Philip one more time in the Bible. The only other statement made about Philip is in Acts 21:8. *8 On the next day we who were Paul’s companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.* The phrase evangelist does not seem to refer to him as a title, but rather a description of his life.

As I close, I am reminded of the story that Rick Warren tells about his father. His father was dying. He had spent about a week in a semi-conscious state. However, in the last hour, he persisted in trying to get out of bed. As those around him settled him back into bed, he would simply reply, “Got to save one more for Jesus!” Warren says in that last hour his father said that phrase 100 times.²

God uses those who are looking to be used, who lift up Jesus, who make sharing about Him a lifestyle.

¹ (Rev. David Holwick Collection of Sermon Illustrations, www.thecorner-stone.org, originally from sermon by Dave Wilkinson.)

² Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 287.