

How To Be An Effective Witness

Acts 8:26-40

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Acts 1:8, I just want to refer to you, is an outline of the book of Acts where Jesus, before His ascension, meeting on the Mount of Olives with His disciples actually said, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you,” that happened in the second chapter, “and ye shall be witnesses,” catch that, “witnesses.” We get our word “martyr” from that, by the way. It means a person who lays down their life. “...unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” You have there an outline of the book of Acts. One of the favorite titles for the book of Acts for me is the title: Jerusalem to Rome. That’s what the book of Acts is. It’s the Church’s spreading of the gospel starting in Jerusalem and ends up in the city of Rome.

The first seven chapters are, “...ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem.” Beginning in Acts 8, we move to the second division where the gospel goes to Samaria and starts to go to the uttermost parts of the world. It spreads out over Judaea and into Samaria. You remember that one of the seven elders chosen to wait on tables, Philip, went down to Samaria. We saw that last week, and God used him to bring about a great revival in the city of Samaria, which is the central area of Israel. Peter and John came down from Jerusalem. They heard that the Samaritans had received the Word of God. They came down and laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Actually, we pick it up as Peter and John have gone back (verse 25) to Jerusalem, and everywhere they go, to every town and village, they’re preaching the gospel; they’re preaching Jesus Christ. Now it’s kind of a, “meanwhile, back at the ranch,” back to Philip.

Some feel that Philip left with Peter and John and was headed back to Jerusalem, and the Holy Spirit led him to go to Gaza, but we can’t be clear about that. The general consensus is that he was still in Samaria and God called him from Samaria to go down to Gaza. Let me say something before I even get started in the text. God was actually leading Philip from a successful evangelistic campaign where he’s preaching to a whole city and many are getting saved. He has him leave that and go down to this desert place and share with one individual. God is concerned about individuals. I believe in mass evangelism and I think, sadly, that the world and the Church are losing out on mass evangelism. I believe that God uses mass evangelism and it should be done. I also believe that the gospel is spread individually by individual believers, that one by one we share with people and they hear the good news and come to Jesus Christ. It’s not enough to just say, “Well, we still have the Billy Graham crusades, the Harvest crusades, and other evangelists filling stadiums,” which, by the way, is decreasing rather than increasing, and say, “Well, that’s the way people get saved.” No. We need to share the gospel. It’s not enough to say, “Well, I’ll just bring my friend or my family member, my unbelieving neighbor to church; and Pastor John will share the gospel, give an invitation, and they’ll come forward and accept Christ.” God wants all of us individually to open our mouths, to look for opportunities, and to tell other people about Jesus.

I know the idea of personal evangelism scares people to death. You know, "Ask me to do anything, but don't ask me to talk to somebody about Jesus. Ask me to do anything, but don't ask me to witness and don't make me put on a sandwich placard that says, Repent or Turn or Burn, and march up and down Main Street, or to pass tracks out. I don't want to do that." We have all these kind of freaky thoughts about what it means to go out and do personal evangelism. A lot of people, by being too zealous, have actually caused a great shame to the cause of the gospel and witnessing. I do believe that we need to be open and receptive in that God wants to use us to talk to our family, our friends, co-workers, neighbors, and absolute strangers that we encounter throughout the day. Wherever we go, that we can be sowing the seed of the gospel and we can see people come to know Jesus Christ.

Philip the evangelist is our focus again tonight, until we get to chapter 21. Later on in the book of Acts we'll see him again in Caesarea where he's married and has kids, so he is not traveling but staying home and kind of minding his ministry there. As we go through this story tonight, there are six characteristics of an effective witness; and I want you to write them down as we go through. How can we be effective in our personal evangelism in sharing the gospel with others. The first is that we are obedient to the Spirit's leading. That's the first characteristic of an effective witness—we're sensitive to the Spirit of God leading and guiding us, and we're Spirit-led and obedient to His leading. Look at verse 26. It says, "And the angel of the Lord," by the way, "the" angel of the Lord is an unfortunate translation. It's referring to an angel of the Lord, "spoke unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. 27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, 28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet." Then, notice verse 29, "Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. 30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?" Let's stop right there.

It says that an angel of the Lord spoke unto Philip. It doesn't tell us how the angel spoke to him. That's not really what's important. What's important is an angel spoke to him. In reading commentaries, they'll take several paragraphs trying to figure out how the angel spoke, and I'm thinking, For heavens sake, it doesn't really matter. All that matters is the angel spoke and what the angel said. That's the important thing. The angel could've appeared in a dream or vision. He could've appeared physically there and gave audible instructions, but he told him to go toward the south, down to the place called Gaza, which is desert. I don't have a map to put on the screen for you again tonight as I did last week, but from Samaria, he would've headed southwest. He would have headed south and west, kind of over Jerusalem, and then headed west and down into what today is known as the Gaza strip. It was a city that was the home of the Philistines in the ancient world. He was to go down to this ancient Philistine city of Gaza. In the Old Testament, it was in Gaza where they worshiped Dagon. Sampson was brought into the temple of Dagon, and he brought the house down upon the Philistines there in the city of Gaza.

Gaza is a desert place about 60 miles, to be specific, southwest of Jerusalem. This would take Philip a couple of days journey, but the point I want to make is the angel does not tell him why he is to go, just to go. He could've argued with him. He could've said, "Well, you tell me why I'm going, and then I'll let you know if I wanna go. You tell me what's going to happen when I get there, and I'll tell you whether or not I'm going to go." Sometimes we say, "Lord, have Your way in my life," and the Lord says, "Okay, I want you to go to Barstow," and you say, "No." "I want you to go to Weed, California and start a ministry." "No thank you, Jesus," you know. We're not really willing to do what the Lord calls us to do. A person that is going to be effective in reaching others is going to be obedient to the leading of the Spirit—to go where He wants you to go, to do what He wants you to do, and to say what He wants you to say. Amen? The angel didn't really yet, as far as the record goes as we know, tell him, "You're going to be used mightily in the life of this really influential Ethiopian man, and he's going to go to Africa and reach the whole continent for My sake." He doesn't say that. He just says to go, and he has to go obediently.

It's interesting, God's leading is not always according to our schedule and plan. God's leading doesn't always seem by human reasoning to be the right thing to do. It's like, "Lord, this doesn't make sense! That is a podunk, desert place! There's nothing out there, and I'm in Samaria and You're using me. People are being healed. People are being delivered. The church is packed; the stadium is full. They're coming to hear me. My picture is on the brochures, you know, "Come hear Philip the evangelist," and everybody's excited about what is happening. Now You want me to leave this, and You want me to go out into the desert to talk to one person?" By human understanding it wouldn't make sense. I point that out because no matter what or where God wants us to go, we must obey God. Amen? God knows what He's doing, we don't. God knows why He wants us to go somewhere, what He wants us to do. We just need to be obedient. It wouldn't make sense to the natural mind, but God was going to do an awesome work. It also shows, again, that there are two types of evangelism—mass evangelism (Samaria) and personal evangelism (the Gaza strip). There's reaching the masses and reaching the individual. Jesus would preach to multitudes, and then He would stop at the well in John 4 at Sychar, Jacob's well, and would talk to one woman who was a lonely heart who needed the good news.

It's important that we understand that Jesus can lead us and guide us, so if you want to be effective in your witness for Jesus Christ, you need to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. He leads you through His Word. He'll lead you by impressions. He'll lead you by thoughts. If you're reading the Word, filled with the Spirit, and open to His leading, God can put people on your heart. God can prompt and direct your heart. God can lead and guide you, "Go talk to that gas station attendant," "Hey, go back and give that person at the checkout stand a tract," or "You see that person sitting on the bench over there? Go, sit there and introduce yourself and talk to them or invite them to church," or "share the gospel." We need to be sensitive to the direction, to the leading of the Holy Spirit. We need to walk by faith, but we need to be led by God's Holy Spirit. Pray and ask God every day when you get up. Say, "Lord, lead me to a hungry heart." Another thing you're going to see in this story is that God prepared the sower, and God prepared the recipient. God prepared the soil. God prepared the sower,

Philip, and God prepared the soil, the Ethiopian. You've got to believe that when you go through your day that God has prepared you to share and has prepared someone to hear. "God, lead me to someone who wants to hear this message," and God will lead you by His Spirit and make that happen.

Here's the second characteristic of effective witness; that is, we need to remember the gospel is for all men. The gospel is for everyone. Notice in verse 27, "And he arose and went: and behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace," which is, by the way, not a name. It's a title like the name Pharaoh would be. "...Candace queen of the Ethiopians," which would be Africa, south of Egypt; so anywhere in that area of northern Africa but south of Egypt. This Ethiopian was clearly a Gentile. The gospel had gone to the Samaritans (I explained last week that they were half Jew and half Gentile), but now the gospel is going to go to this Ethiopian, this man from Africa. Another thing that we need to remember is that the gospel is for everyone. It's not for us to say, "Well, they're not good people so we won't take the gospel to them," or "The gospel is only for the United States," or "It's only for white folks," and "We don't go to these people," or "We don't go to this ethnic group," but the gospel is for everyone. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Amen? We need to have a vision as big as God's, and that's the vision for the whole world. We need to remember that.

This Ethiopian's race was Gentile. His rank (verse 27) was that he was actually a man of "great authority." He was a great, powerful, wealthy, well-to-do man. The fact that he was riding in a chariot means that he was a rich dude. He was in charge of Candace's, the queen of Africa, treasure. If you had a chariot in those days you were well off. He probably had a fine chariot too. It probably had a beautiful paint job and mag rims on it and stuff. It was probably lowered with flames painted on the sides. He was a man of influence, so he was a man of a Gentile background, rank, and his religion is mentioned as well in verse 27 where it says, "...and had come to Jerusalem for to worship," and he had the Scriptures (verse 28). He was actually reading from the prophet of Isaiah. The practice in those days, even if you were alone when you read, you always read out loud. He was in his chariot, and he's reading from Isaiah.

Now, that indicates that though a Gentile, this Ethiopian had gone to Jerusalem to try to find God. He was probably what was called a proselyte or a proselyte of the gate. Gentiles could become Jews by proselyting into their religion—the same thing can happen today. They were known as proselytes; but if they didn't become a full-blown Jew, they were called a proselyte of the gate. He had gone to Jerusalem, but he's coming back. He's reading from Isaiah, but it seems as though he didn't find what he was looking for. His search for God wasn't full or complete. There was something missing in his life. We need to remember that even religious people need to hear the good news about Jesus Christ, so be obedient to the Spirit. Remember the gospel is for everyone: rich, poor, black, white, brown, yellow, whatever color. If there are green people out there somewhere, it's for green people. It's for everyone. It doesn't matter if they're rich or poor, educated or uneducated. Sometimes we get intimidated if someone looks like they're affluent, educated, well-off or maybe religious, "We'll just leave them alone." We need to realize that the gospel is for everyone.

Verse 28, “Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.” What a coincidence! We see the hand of God in bringing this witness together, and I believe that God can do the same even for us. He had the Scriptures. “Then the Spirit,” again, “said to Philip,” we don’t know how He said, maybe an audible voice, “Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.” It almost seems to indicate in the text that Philip, on his desert trek down to Gaza, was sitting there waiting for the right person to pass by along the highway there. Then, when he saw this one specific Ethiopian man in this chariot, the Holy Spirit said, “That’s the person I want you to talk to.” Then, he took off and shared with him.

Here’s my third point to be an effective witness. We should witness enthusiastically. Philip ran (verse 30). “And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?” Notice, he didn’t meander or take his time. He just took off and beelined that chariot, that Ethiopian. You know, to be enthusiastic when you witness is so important. It’s important that we share with zeal and excitement! We don’t want to have zeal without knowledge. We don’t want to be obnoxious, but we want to be excited about the good things of God—the things that God has done for us! It’s kind of hard to win people to Christ when you’re all bummed out and sad like, “You know, I’m really bummed out right now. I don’t know if I’m really even saved, but I want to tell you about Jesus.” It’s like, you go out witnessing and you look like you’ve been baptized in lemon juice. People will think, I don’t want what you’ve got. That’s terrible. He ran, and he was excited. Also, the idea that we should be eager to share the gospel with others, and I really believe that we can pray and ask God to give us an attitude of excitement.

Then, notice my fourth characteristic of an effective witness is in verse 30 as well, he makes contact. He said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” I think this is one of the most important aspects of personal evangelism. Obviously, these points aren’t exhaustive on the subject, but I think too often we try to be so tactful that we never make contact. There’s that one extreme that just says, “Well, I just let my life witness for Jesus.” That’s fine, but at some point and in some time, make contact. We’re going to see in a moment that Philip opened his mouth and preached unto him Jesus. If you don’t open your mouth and preach Jesus, they don’t know what makes you happy. They don’t know what makes you different. They don’t know what makes you tick. You can’t just live a life before them...now do that—please do that because if you don’t, then your witness is nullified by the way that you live—but don’t try to excuse your lack of enthusiasm or contact by just saying, “Well, you know, I’m a silent witness. I’m of Christ of the secret order. My goal is to just keep quiet,” you know, and you expect your neighbors to ring your doorbell, Ding dong! “We’ve been watching you for years now and just want to know, what must I do to be saved?” Why are you laughing? Because you know, it ain’t very likely that’s going to happen, right? We need to make contact, and we need to approach people.

Here’s a very practical tip. I think it’s clear from this passage, and I’ve known it to be true in my own life. Sometimes the best way to connect with people is to start by asking them a question. It’s that simple. Just ask them a question. “Hey, that’s a nice car, where’d you get that?” Ask them about something they’re doing, or ask them about where they work or something about

what's going on. Or, you know, "Hey, it's a beautiful day." Just start striking up a conversation. You don't have to just walk up to them and say, "Are you washed in the blood of Jesus Christ? Have you been regenerated?" I mean, you walk up and just start talking to them. I know that in our culture today when you talk to somebody, a stranger, it's like they get kind of freaked, "What are you going to try to rob me or something?" We're so freaked out by strangers talking to us today. I've noticed that when I just allow myself to talk to people, the conversation so easily can come around to Christ, but when we just go, "Well, I don't talk to anybody. I want to be left alone."

As a pastor, when I fly on an airplane many times to travel to preach or teach, sometimes just getting on an airplane for me can be a real blessing because nobody knows me. I'm gone. I can be alone. I can read a book. Leave me alone, I just want to sleep or sit here. Inevitably, somebody will sit down, "Oh, hi. Where are you going? What are you doing? What do you do for a living?" The minute you tell them you're a pastor they either hate you or love you. They have all these questions for you. It's like, "Uhhhh," and the Lord convicts me sometimes. You think, just because you're on an airplane, you're not on your pulpit on Sunday and you're away from your church doesn't mean that you're not still to be an ambassador for Me, and that you need to share the good news wherever you go. Sometimes we just need to make contact. Again, John 4, when Jesus sat down on the well and the woman came with the water pitcher, what did Jesus do? He said, "Can I have a drink of water?" That whole dialogue just started with Jesus saying, "Can I have a drink?" She said, "Why would you, being a Jew, ask water of me, a woman of Samaria? The Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." The whole conversation started, and Jesus said, "If you knew who I was and what I can give you, you'd ask of Me and I would give you living water." And she said, "How are you going to get living water, you don't have a well, and this well is very deep." The whole thing just took off. He just said, "Can I have something to drink?"

I've always thought it would be great to just go to a public park and stand by the drinking fountain. When they start to drink say, "You can drink of that water but you'll thirst again, but the water that Jesus will give you will be a well springing up into everlasting life!" They'll probably take off running or something. Just look for a way to make contact or ask a question or get engaged in a conversation.

I love the fact that Philip just said, "Do you understand what you're reading?" There's another little footnote in this thought; that is, it's possible to read the Bible and not understand it. Just because someone is reading the Bible doesn't mean they'll understand it. It indicates that God can use us to explain the Scriptures. God can use us to interpret the Scriptures. Read the Bible, yes, but do you understand what you're reading? I'm reading, but I don't understand what I'm reading. I think by providence that this Ethiopian was searching, and he's reading from the book of Isaiah. Philip made the contact, as we need to at least make contact and maybe start by asking a question. Maybe, "Do you know where you're going to go when you die?" or "Have you ever read the Bible?" or "What do you think about Jesus Christ?" or "Have you ever heard the gospel?" Just ask them a question. Another thing to do when you make contact is to let them talk and listen, too. If you're not listening to them, where they're coming

from and getting to know what really is going on in their life, then that's unfortunate. You need to be listening as well as talking to them.

The Ethiopian responded (verse 31), "And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him," in his chariot. How cool is that? The place of Scripture where he was reading was this...and by the way, this is taken from Isaiah 53:7-8. If any of you Bible students out there know your Bibles, you know that this is one of the greatest Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. This is an amazing text which speaks of the substitutionary, sacrificial death of Jesus Christ for the sins of the world—the Jewish people in Jesus' day and even today, struggle with who the prophet is speaking of in this passage. We know, clearly, that he's speaking there of Jesus, and he begins to quote from it in verse 32, "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: 33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away; and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth." It's referring to Jesus giving His life on the Cross for our sins, "...he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities...with his stripes we are healed," Isaiah the prophet said.

Verse 34, "And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?" How good is that? The Spirit said to go. He went. The Spirit said, "Speak to this man." He speaks to this man and says, "Do you understand what you're reading?" The man just so happened to be reading the Bible from Isaiah. I have actually, many times when I've been in public and seen people reading a Bible, struck up a conversation with them. Many times they've been unbelievers or they've been from a cult group or had some crazy ideas, and I began to dialogue and share with them and tell them the gospel. It's really cool how God opened this door and no coincidence. God has it all under control that this Ethiopian was reading from the book of Isaiah. He says, "Do you understand?" And he says, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" Philip jumps up in the chariot, and the eunuch answered and said to Philip, "I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?"

Here's my fifth point in how to be an effective witness—use the Scripture and share Jesus. Be knowledgeable of the Word, know the Word, be ready in the Bible, know the Scriptures. You don't have to be a theologian. You don't have to know Hebrew or Greek, but you should know some basic verses memorized and ready: John 3:16, Ephesians 2:8-9, the Roman road passages. You're ready to share the gospel because notice verse 35. "Then Philip opened his mouth," which if you're going to be an effective witness, it's a good idea to open your mouth, "and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." I love that! He opened his mouth and took from those Scriptures and began to preach unto him Jesus. We need to know the Scriptures if we're going to use the Scriptures. As I said, you don't have to be some theologian. You don't have to have a PhD in theology. You just need to know, Once I was blind, and now I can see. You just need to know some simple Bible truths, but you do need to know some truths.

What if Philip had not known that this Isaiah passage was about Jesus? What if the Ethiopian

would've asked him, "Whose he speaking about?" He replies, "I don't know. Let me ask my pastor this Sunday. Let me go home and get my commentaries out and see if I can figure it out." There's a time for that, and that happens to me. There are times that people will come up to me, and some of you probably know you're some of the people that have stumped me on Sunday's. You've come up, "Pastor, what about this?" "I don't know. Let me look into that." When somebody is hungry and needs to hear about Jesus, we ought to know enough about who Jesus is. Notice he preached unto him Jesus. Let me encourage you that if you want to be an effective witness and you want to share the gospel, center and focus on the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Talk about His incarnation and virgin birth. Talk about His sinless life. Talk about His substitutionary death. You must get to the Cross. There is power in the Cross, and the Cross is so necessary for people to come to salvation. Preaching the Cross is foolishness to those that are perishing, but it's the power of God to those that are saved.

I recently was listening to an old video of Billy Graham. He was talking about how very rarely but he, in his early years, would preach and not get to the Cross and not preach Christ, and there would be a lack of response. He noticed whenever he preached Christ and the Cross that people responded to the gospel. I think that's true. Don't talk about religion. Don't talk about peripherals. Don't talk about nonessentials. Get to the heart—that Christ came from heaven, was born of a virgin, that He was the Godman and lived a sinless life, that He gave His life voluntarily to die on the Cross for our sins. Explain what He did on the Cross—that He took our sins and He was the substitute. Then talk about His burial and resurrection, that Jesus was buried and He rose. Be able to defend the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and be able to give to every man an answer for the reason of the hope that lies in you. Do it with reverence and respect. Focus on Jesus. In Romans 10:17 it says, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," which literally, by the way, is a word preached about Christ. It's the word preached about Christ, so center on the Person and work of Christ.

I love verse 35, that he, "...opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture," he didn't say, "Well, let's turn somewhere else where I'm familiar with." He took that very passage in Isaiah and knew that it was about Jesus and sprungboard from that. By the way, you can take anything in the Old Testament and somewhere you can connect it to Jesus Christ. Verse 36, "And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water," it doesn't say if it was a lake or a river or a cistern or what it was, but they came to some water, "and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37 And Philip said, if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him."

To just kind of save you again, and I just talked about asking me questions after the service, some of you may have a translation that has omitted verse 37. I don't want to get into the pros and cons of whether this belongs in the Bible or doesn't or why it would be here, but in some of the older manuscripts it doesn't appear. Some certain manuscripts, it doesn't appear, and so some modern translations have omitted verse 37. Certainly, all New Testament scholars, at least that I have studied, agree that there must have been some interaction or dialogue

between Philip and the Ethiopian. Certainly, what is said in verse 37 is scriptural and biblical and consistent with Scripture. My personal feeling is that it belongs in the Bible and shouldn't be omitted. That's one of the reasons why I still use my King James translation, not that it's the only inspired translation or the best translation, but it includes this in the passage.

Notice how important verse 37 is, by the way. "And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Then, in verse 38, the chariot stood still, "and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him." This is my sixth and last point on how to be an effective witness. I want to say some things about the passage, but write this down. Seek, if possible, a decision. Seek a decision. Sometimes, what we do, too, we share the gospel, we tell people about Jesus, and then we just stop there and don't ask, "Would you like to pray right now and ask Jesus in your heart? Would you like to trust Jesus Christ as your Savior?" I'm not saying that all the time we need to ask for a decision but a lot more often than we do, a lot more often. I'm guilty of this quite often.

The challenge for me is I get to preach to people all the time and see people saved so that when I go grocery shopping I don't want to talk to anybody. I'm just here to buy some orange juice right now. Besides, it's my day off. I'm not on duty right now, but I realize that it doesn't work that way. When you're sharing with somebody, sometimes you need to actually say, "Ok, enough is enough. You've heard the gospel. Would you like to accept Christ right now?" What'll happen sometimes is they'll say, "Yes, I would." You go, "Whoah?! Wait a minute! You sure you're ready?" "Yes. I am." "Whoa, let's call my pastor then, right now. Why don't you come to church this Sunday?" I believe that every one of us as Christians ought to be ready to lead another individual in a prayer of repentance and faith and trust in Jesus Christ. You don't have to have a canned little saying. It doesn't have to be just the right words, but you're able to say, "Okay, I'm going to lead you in a prayer, and I want you to repeat these words after me. Make them a prayer from your heart, and let's pray." Say, "Jesus, I'm sorry for my sins. Will You please forgive me? Will You come into my heart? I trust You as my Savior. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit. Help me to live for You, turn from my sins, follow You as Lord and Savior." You ought to be ready and prepared to be able to lead somebody in a prayer like that. You don't have to be ordained. You don't have to be an official clergyman—remember Philip was a laymen. He wasn't even an apostle. He was chosen to wait on tables. He was a deacon, at the most. He was just a servant among the other brethren at the church, yet God was using him to lead others to Christ.

The passage doesn't say that Philip led him in the Sinner's prayer, but it seems as though Philip probably gave him enough information about Jesus. It said he preached Christ, and the Ethiopian trusted and believed in Jesus. That's why when Philip questioned him, "If you believe with all your heart," and he said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God," you've given me the message, and now I do believe.

What followed his confession was baptism. I know that we don't believe that here, and very few of you would have a hang up with it or a problem, but there are some Christian circles that

actually believe that unless you're baptized in water, you cannot be saved. This is an indication that baptism follows conversion. It's not part of your conversion, it's the outward show of an inward work. You aren't saved because you're baptized, you're baptized because you're saved. When we get to Acts 10, Gentile Cornelius and his household are saved, filled with the Holy Spirit, and they even speak in tongues, Peter says, "Can any man forbid water that these should be baptized which have," past tense, "received the Holy Spirit just like we have?" You don't get the Holy Spirit when you're dunked in water. You get the Holy Spirit when you believe in Jesus Christ and trust in Him, and then you're dunked in water as a rite or a ritual—an outward showing of an inward work. Baptism doesn't save us. It certainly doesn't merit salvation, and not that it's that big of a deal, but it would also indicate in this passage that he was baptized by total immersion because it says they both went down into the water, which would indicate—it's not a locked-tight argument—but would indicate that he took him down into the water to immerse him in water baptism. It doesn't give us the formula but Jesus said that we baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and I would believe that Philip would have done it with that formula; which, again, salvation precedes baptism so it's not really the issue.

Verse 39, "And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he," that is, the eunuch, "went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip was found at Azotus," which is actually the ancient, Old Testament city of Ashdod, which was about 20 miles north of Gaza. Again, which was a Philistine area, "and passing through he," Philip, "preached in all the cities," which would be Joppa and Lydda, "till he came to Caesarea," which was 20 miles south of the modern city of Haifa. By the way, when we get to Acts 21:8-9, we find Philip 20 years later in Caesarea, and he has a house and four daughters. It seems that's where he ended up staying and living, but he brought him to a decision—If you believe that Jesus is the Savior, you trusted Christ, then you can be baptized.

Don't be afraid to ask someone, "Would you like to accept the Lord? Would you like to pray right now? Would you like to open your heart to Jesus Christ right now?" If they say, "No. I'm not ready." At least you gave them the opportunity. If they say, "No, not right now," maybe a very gentle, tactful warning. Just say, "Okay. That's fine, but remember Jesus said that you're either for Me or against Me. By saying no, you're rejecting Jesus Christ; and the Bible always puts salvation in the present tense, "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." The Bible says, if you hear God's voice, don't harden your hearts. Don't be afraid to press for a decision and say, "If you're ready, would you like to trust Jesus Christ and invite Him to come into your heart and your life?"

Notice the result of the Ethiopian's conversion. It says there that, "...he went on his way rejoicing." Joy is always the result of salvation. I don't want to miss what is a mind-blowing kind of an aspect to the story in verse 39 that mystifies Bible students in that when it says, "...the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more." It's like, What in the world is that all about? It's kind of like Philip got raptured sideways. He puts him under the water and BOOM! the eunuch comes up and no Philip. Where'd Philip go? He's gone! This is a cool reference to, I believe, a supernatural miracle.

Some Bible scholars try to explain it away—it's just a figure of speech or language for Philip just left and they didn't see him or whatever. The Greek phrase that's used here actually means to catch or to snatch away. It indicates, even grammatically, that Philip was caught away instantly. The Ethiopian didn't see him any longer, and he was passing up the coast and ends up in Caesarea. I believe that this is actually a reference to God catching Philip and transporting him. You can imagine, Philip the flying evangelist! What was that like? I mean, SWOOSH! "What was that? Awwwww...it was Philip the flying evangelist!" He's flying with his cape flying back, bugs stuck in his teeth like a motorcyclist, you know. To me, I can't wait to get to heaven and say, "Philip, what happened? That was insane!" It's not unique though.

Remember when Elijah went to heaven and God sent a chariot. A flaming chariot came, swooped down and scooped him up, and took him away to heaven. Elisha the prophet saw him taken up, and his mantle fell on him, which is that catching up. I believe also that "Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him." I believe that the Church is going to be raptured or caught up or just CLAP! instantly disappear and we'll be caught up to meet the Lord in heaven—that the Lord does that. It's just an interesting little aspect to the story. The interesting thing is the power of one life. All we have is church history to go on, but church history says that he went to Africa, became the first bishop of the churches in Africa, and God used this Ethiopian to take the gospel to Africa and to spread the good news of Jesus Christ on that continent. Never underestimate the value of one individual that you might lead to Christ. You never know how God might use them.

You might be feeling, "Well, you know, I haven't really done anything great or awesome for God." Maybe one child or one individual, one elderly person shut up in a rest home you go to see and tell them about Jesus. They pray and invite Christ into their heart and life, and God uses them. When you share the gospel with somebody and then they share the gospel with somebody else; and they share the gospel with someone else, then they share the gospel with someone, and that someone else becomes the next Billy Graham. You never know what God can do through one individual. Don't underestimate the importance of sharing the good news with one person.

So, be obedient to His Spirit. Be sensitive, and let the Spirit of God lead you. Remember that all men need Jesus—no one too rich, no one too poor, every country, every tribe, every kindred, every tongue. Ask God to fill you with a love for the lost. Be tactful. Make contact. Ask questions. Open your mouth and preach Jesus, and don't be afraid to bring to a point where you bring a decision, "Would you like to accept Christ? Would you like to trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior?" You'd be amazed how God can use you. We need to all pray, "God, here am I, use me." Amen?