



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH
LEWISVILLE

Session 10

Out of Our Comfort Zones

Summary and Goal

After Stephen was killed for preaching the gospel, the church was scattered and believers took the gospel with them as they went. Philip's journey continued as he took the gospel to the nations by sharing with an Ethiopian man. Philip and the rest of the scattered believers did not do anything incredible, they simply followed the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Main Passages

Acts 8:1-40

Session Outline

1. Scattered to Gather (Acts 8:1-8)
2. Opposition Will Come (Acts 8:9-25)
3. Spirit-Led Opportunities (Acts 8:26-40)

Theological Theme

The gospel is for all people.

Christ Connection

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told His disciples to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (See Acts 1:8.)

Missional Application

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

Historical Context of Acts

Purpose

The Book of Acts emphasizes the work of God through the Holy Spirit in the lives of people who devoted themselves to Jesus Christ, especially Paul as he led the Gentile missionary endeavor. It is no exaggeration to say that the Christian church was built through the dynamic power of the Spirit working through chosen vessels. Another important concept is the radial spread of the gospel from Jews to Gentiles, from Jerusalem to Judea, from Samaria and on to the rest of the world (1:8). Thus Christianity transformed from being a sect within Judaism to a world religion that eventually gained acceptance everywhere, even in the heart of the pagan Roman Empire: Rome itself.

Author

The Book of Acts is formally anonymous. The traditional view is that the author was the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke—Luke the physician and traveling companion of Paul (Col 4:14; 2Tm 4:11; Phm 24). As early as the second century AD, church leaders such as Irenaeus wrote that Luke was the author of Acts. Irenaeus based his view on the “we” passages in Acts, five sections where the author changes from the third person (“he/she” and “they”) to first-person plural (“we”) as he narrates the action (16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–29; 28:1–16). Irenaeus and many scholars since his time have interpreted these passages to mean that the author of Acts was one of the eyewitness companions of Paul. Luke fits this description better than any other candidate, especially given the similar themes between the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

Setting

The date of composition of the Book of Acts is to a large extent directly tied to the issue of authorship. A number of scholars have argued that Acts should be dated to the early 60s (at the time of Paul’s imprisonment). Acts closes with Paul still in prison in Rome (28:30–31). Although it is possible that Luke wrote at a later date, a time when Paul had been released, it is more plausible to think that he completed this book while Paul was still in prison. Otherwise he would have ended the book by telling about Paul’s release.

Special Features

The Book of Acts provides a glimpse into the first three decades of the early church (ca AD 30–63) as it spread and multiplied after the ascension of Jesus Christ. It is not a detailed or comprehensive history. Rather, it focuses on the role played by apostles such as Peter, who ministered primarily to Jews, and Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

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Condensed Leader Guide

Out of Our Comfort Zones

Introduction

- ❓ If you could go to one place on vacation, where would you go and why?
- ❓ What place would you avoid at all costs?
- ❓ How does God's mission call us out of our comfort zones?

The mostly Jewish Christians felt comfortable spreading the gospel in Jerusalem and Judea because they were Jewish areas. But God's mission was bigger than that (see Acts 1:8) and included people who weren't like them. One of the unexpected benefits of the persecution the church faced in Jerusalem was that it forced the church to leave and go to other areas, which helped them along in the task Jesus left for them.

1. Scattered to Gather (Acts 8:1-8)

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 gospel to spread to places it had never gone before. What the Jewish leaders intended for evil, God used for good. (See Gen. 50:20.)

- ❓ From verse 4, what did these scattered believers do? Is that surprising to you? Why or why not?
- ❓ Read Acts 1:8. What is the connection between Jesus' command and the events of Acts 8:1-4?
- ❓ How did the signs and miracles Philip performed play an important role in the proclamation of the gospel?
- ❓ What extraordinary thing in verse 8 happened as a result of Philip's faithfulness?

2. Opposition Will Come (Acts 8:9-25)

The work being done in Samaria did not come without opposition. When a sorcerer from the city saw all the work the Lord was doing through Philip, he believed and was baptized; yet he confessed belief for the wrong reasons.

- ❓ Can a person say they believe, be baptized, and follow the teachings of the church and not be saved? Explain.
- ❓ Why was it important for these apostles to evaluate God's work in a new place? What does that teach us about the mission of the church today?
- ❓ What does this passage teach about the necessity of the Holy Spirit in regard to salvation? Why might God have withheld His Spirit from these new believers for a time?

3. Open to Opportunities (Acts 8:26-40)

Philip was a model of consistency in his witness for Christ. 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. On the road to Gaza, Philip found an Ethiopian man riding in a chariot on his way home from worshiping in Jerusalem (v. 27). While traveling, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

- ❓ How would you characterize Philip's ministry in Samaria before this call in verse 26? What good arguments could Philip have used to stay put and continue the ministry in Samaria? What did he do instead (v. 27)? Why?
- ❓ What were the keys to Philip's success in reaching out to the man? What can we learn from his approach?
- ❓ What does this encounter say to us about the connection between our own fluency with Scripture and sharing the gospel with people?
- ❓ What apprehension did the man's question in verse 36 convey? What was the necessary requirement for baptism?

Conclusion

- ❓ Sharing the gospel often makes people feel uncomfortable. What are some reasons for this discomfort? How does Acts 8 speak to us about our discomfort?
- ❓ God used persecution to grow the church. When have you seen God divinely use difficult circumstances in your life to bring glory to Himself? How might He use difficult circumstances in our church to bring glory to Himself?

❓ For Further Discussion

While this passage from Acts primarily focuses on the work of Philip in Samaria and "to the ends of the earth," there were many other people ministering whose names we will never know. How does the community of faith help us minister in difficult places?



Expanded Leader Guide

Out of Our Comfort Zones

Introduction

- ❓ If you could go to one place on vacation, where would you go and why?
- ❓ What place would you avoid at all costs?
- ❓ How does God's mission call us out of our comfort zones?


The mostly Jewish Christians felt comfortable spreading the gospel in Jerusalem and Judea because they were Jewish areas. But God's mission was bigger than that (see Acts 1:8) and included people who weren't like them. One of the unexpected benefits of the persecution the church faced in Jerusalem was that it forced the church to leave and go to other areas, which helped them along in the task Jesus left for them.


The New Testament makes it clear that every Christian should take the gospel with them wherever they go. Many people growing up in church have come to see those who share the gospel as a gifted and called subset within the church—those with the gift of evangelism—but the Great Commission is a call for all followers of Jesus.

1. Scattered to Gather (Acts 8:1-8)

- ❓ From verse 4, what did these scattered believers do? Is that surprising to you? Why or why not?
- ❓ Read Acts 1:8. What is the connection between Jesus' command and the events of Acts 8:1-4?

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 gospel to spread to places it had never gone before. What the Jewish leaders intended for evil, God used for good. (See Gen. 50:20.)


-  How did the signs and miracles Philip performed play an important role in the proclamation of the gospel?

-  What extraordinary thing in verse 8 happened as a result of Philip's faithfulness?

Popular opinion held that Samaritans were second-class citizens, a mixed race of Jews and foreigners who inhabited the land after the Assyrian conquest. (See 2 Kings 17:24.) Samaritans were viewed as 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 have no place in Christianity, which is something Jesus Himself modeled. Philip's performing these acts gave evidence that all believers were continuing their Lord's ministry and validated ordinary believers' work as Christ's extraordinary work.


2. Opposition Will Come (Acts 8:9-25)


The work being done in Samaria did not come without opposition. When a sorcerer from the city saw all the work the Lord was doing through Philip, he believed and was baptized; yet he confessed belief for the wrong reasons.

-  Can a person say they believe, be baptized, and follow the teachings of the church and not be saved? Explain.

Simon had a long-standing gig in Samaria. He had the attention of the masses, and he liked it that way. Simon's practice was sorcery, not ministry, but any of us who have special talents or gifts face the temptation of forgetting who we are. The power of the Holy Spirit was visibly greater than Simon's sorcery. Simon was impressed enough to believe on some level and wanted to know and experience more. He knew supernatural power was present and was amazed by it. But being amazed at supernatural power is not saving faith. Following powerful Christian

leaders is not saving faith. God gives us those leaders to help us as we follow Christ, but we must guard against becoming so enamored with them that we follow them instead of Christ.


-  Why was it important for these apostles to evaluate God's work in a new place? What does that teach us about the mission of the church today?


-  What does this passage teach about the necessity of the Holy Spirit in regard to salvation? Why might God have withheld His Spirit from these new believers for a time?

We do not find some kind of “second blessing” here in which the Holy Spirit comes to believers sometime subsequent to their salvation. We must remember that Acts is a transitional book. The entire New Testament makes it plain that people who do not have the Spirit of God are not born again. The very act of the Spirit in our hearts brings about salvation. Having taken up residence for that act, He never leaves. The lesson for us today is that each of us has everything we need to do gospel ministry and see people come to saving faith. We may face hurdles and opposition, but ordinary men and women emboldened by the Holy Spirit are who the Lord has invited to participate in His work.

3. Open to Opportunities (Acts 8:26-40)

Philip was a model of consistency in his witness for Christ. 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. On the road to Gaza, Philip found an Ethiopian man riding in a chariot on his way home from worshiping in Jerusalem (v. 27). While traveling, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

-  How would you characterize Philip's ministry in Samaria before this call in verse 26? What good arguments could Philip have used to stay put and continue the ministry in Samaria?

-  What did he do instead (v. 27)? Why?

The Ethiopian man was reading from the Old Testament Scriptures and had been to worship in Jerusalem, the center of Judaism. Evidently, he was a spiritual man and was curious about Scripture and eager to learn. The Spirit directed Philip to join (literally, “be glued to”) the eunuch’s chariot. Philip would have had no trouble walking alongside the slow-moving vehicle and conversing with the eunuch. As Philip approached the chariot and perhaps placed his hand on it as he walked, we may assume he did so carefully to signal his peaceful intentions. Philip seized the opportunity to open the man’s eyes to Jesus’ fulfillment of Scripture.

- ❓ What were the keys to Philip’s success in reaching out to the man? What can we learn from his approach?

Philip obeyed God’s leading, approached people, asked questions, listened to their responses, and pulled the connecting points of the gospel out. We are able to do the same thing if we are attentive and living with our eyes open towards God. Philip was not put-off by being in Samaria or when he was called to minister to an African man. Philip saw all people regardless of ethnicity as in need of the gospel.

- ❓ What does this encounter say to us about the connection between our own fluency with Scripture and sharing the gospel with people?

The Ethiopian man was reading Isaiah 53:7-8, which prophesied the crucifixion of Christ on our behalf. When the man asked to whom this passage referred, Philip proceeded to tell him about Jesus. Philip probably used the rest of Isaiah 53, as well as other Scriptures, to tell the man about Jesus. (See Luke 24:25-27,44.) The gospel is for everyone and knowing the Bible helps us to pull the natural connecting points out and lead other people to see them as well.

As the chariot continued down the road, at some point the man responded positively to Philip’s presentation of the gospel. When they came to some water, the man asked whether anything prevented him from being baptized.

- ❓ What apprehension did the man’s question in verse 36 convey? What was the necessary requirement for baptism?

Aware his physical condition prevented him from converting to Judaism, the man wondered if it would hinder him from becoming a follower of Jesus. His question may have expressed apprehension and hope. Faith in Christ precedes baptism. The word *believe* means “to trust,” and “to commit oneself.” The eunuch was not merely to accept mentally what Philip presented; he was to commit his life wholeheartedly to Christ. After baptizing the man, Philip left him and made his way to Caesarea, “preaching the gospel in all the towns” along the way (v. 40). The Ethiopian man continued home, a changed man and believer in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

- ❓ Sharing the gospel often makes people feel uncomfortable. What are some reasons for this discomfort? How does Acts 8 speak to us about our discomfort?

- ❓ God used persecution to grow the church. When have you seen God divinely use difficult circumstances in your life to bring glory to Himself? How might He use difficult circumstances in our church to bring glory to Himself?

- ❓ While this passage from Acts primarily focuses on the work of Philip in Samaria and “to the ends of the earth,” there were many other people ministering whose names we will never know. How does the community of faith help us minister in difficult places?

Prayer of Response

Ask God to lead us to be a bold body of believers who are eager and ready to take the gospel wherever He leads. Ask for specific opportunities to help people see the love of Christ you have found.

Family Discussion

Family Discussion Questions for Children

- *Is it hard for you to talk to people about Jesus? Why?*
- *What are some things you can do now so that when God gives you an opportunity to talk to someone about Jesus, you'll be ready?*

Family Discussion Questions for Teens

- *Do you think about persecution as something that is a real possibility for you or only as something that happens in other places in the world? Why?*
- *Why should the reality of persecution around the world cause us to preach the gospel more here in the Lewisville area, not less?*

For Next Week

Session Title

- From Here to There

Main Scripture

- Acts 9

Session Outline

1. Whatever Means Necessary (Acts 9:1-9)
2. Reluctant Obedience (Acts 9:10-19)
3. A Changed Life (Acts 9:20-25)
4. Advocates for Change (Acts 9:26-31)

Memorize

So those who were scattered went on their way preaching the word.

—Acts 8:4

Extended Commentary

Acts 8:1-40

8:1. Events surrounding Stephen's testimony and murder led to severe persecution of the church in Jerusalem. All believers except the apostles were scattered to nearby regions. Hence the persecution helped spread the gospel to surrounding areas such as Judea and Samaria. 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. This 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). Stephen obeyed and encountered an Ethiopian eunuch returning home from worshipping 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 (see v. 27). Ethiopia was an area south of Egypt. Candace is the hereditary title for all the queens of Ethiopia and this eunuch was in charge of her entire treasury. He was sitting in his chariot, perhaps an ox-drawn wagon.

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.

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 in 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. A miracle is indicated by 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.