

PART FIVE  
EVANGELISM



**STEWARDSHIP**  
MAXIMIZING GOD'S BLESSINGS FOR HIS GLORY  
& OUR BENEFIT

You may know that before I became a pastor I was a medical technologist for eight years. I worked in labs of hospitals and medical clinics running blood tests. I like science and the jobs were fine but it definitely was not my life's calling.

At least back then, it was a career mostly populated by women. I met some nice people but like any other job, I met some different people as well. There was this one woman who really stood out from the others. She was good at her job and nice enough, but she held the strangest secret. She had children that she never talked about. And I mean she had young children still at home, I don't mean she has grown kids who had already left home. And no one knew she had kids at all for the longest time.

You know how the workplace is. When you are not slaving away, you are chatting about what's happening in your life. It's just what you do at work. This woman was somewhat quiet but I wouldn't call her shy. She talked about herself. She talked about her hobbies. Once in a blue moon she mentioned her husband but it was at least six months before any of us knew she had kids. Understand that this was decades before facebook and social media but I highly doubt she would have put pictures of her kids there anyway.

It got stranger still when one day she was talking with another woman in the lab and told her how much she loved her children. It was a rare revealing moment but she went on for a while about how much she loved them. After that, no one heard a peep for a few more months. You know how work gossip goes, right? Well the rumors started flying. Why would she express undying love for her children but never talk about them? Someone wondered if there was possibly abuse in the home. Not only that, but several of us had run into her around town and she never had her kids with her. So how could she love her kids when she never talked about them to others and seemingly never took her kids with her?

What I have just shared with you is not a real story but a parable. Here's the meaning of the parable. How can Christians who claim undying love for Jesus never talk about him with others

and seemingly don't take Christ with them into their daily lives? If you love someone, aren't you compelled to talk about them? And if you don't talk about them, do you really love them?

This message is about stewardship of one of life's exciting responsibilities--sharing the good news that Christ died to offer them eternal life. This is also part of the

1. We steward the gospel by guarding sound doctrine.
2. We steward the gospel by keeping the gospel at the center.
3. We steward the gospel by choosing healthy leadership.
4. We steward the gospel by sharing the gospel.

The gospel needs to be protected and guarded by not closed behind locked doors. I would give equal weight to all four of these principles. If you don't share the gospel, it is just as dangerous as ignoring any of these other three principles.

Our text this morning is the eighth chapter of Acts and the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

*26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. 27 And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." 30 So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:*

*"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter  
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
so he opens not his mouth.*

*33 In his humiliation justice was denied him.*

*Who can describe his generation?*

*For his life is taken away from the earth."*

*34 And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. 36 And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" 38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.*

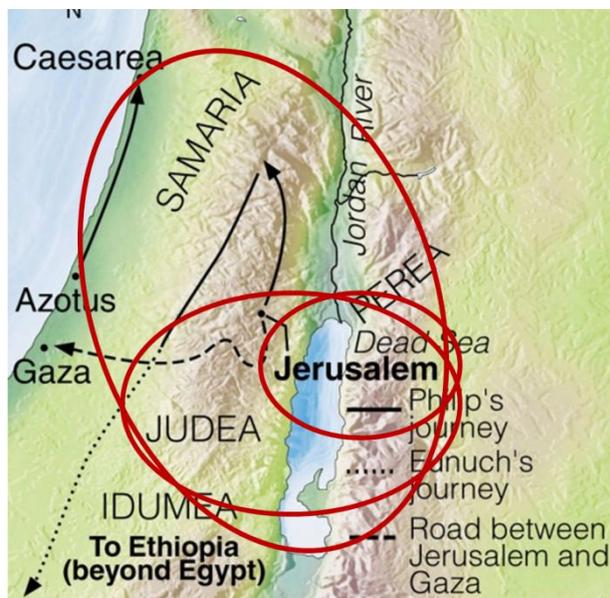
### **1. We steward evangelism by straightforward obedience.**

In the first years of the early church, all evangelism was centered around Jerusalem, but Jesus said, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." How would they reach the "end of the earth" if they never left Jerusalem?

Enter Saul, the "persecutor of the church" (Philippians 3-remember this from last Sunday?), which he previously wore like a badge of honor. Saul watched over the execution of Stephen which sparked a revival *outside* of Jerusalem.

*Acts 8:1-5 And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.*

The apostles were not obeying so God sent persecution to get them moving. Philip was one of the men who were scattered due to the persecution. And what did in with his persecution? Did he hang his head in shame? Did he write a blog post about the evils of Christian persecution? No, he simply obeyed. *Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ.* Philip decided that if he could not proclaim Christ in Jerusalem and Judea, he would do it in Samaria.



Do you see what was happening here? Where did Jesus say that his people would be his witnesses? Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. Do you see? The Great Commission has just pushed farther out! They aren't quite at the end of the world yet but by this point, they had taken the next steps.

So you could say that Philip "accidentally" obeyed the Lord here. The Lord brought the persecution in order to spread believers far and wide. Philip did not go to Samaria of his own choosing, at least not completely. He may not have planned to obey the next step in the Great Commission but he did obey the Lord simply by proclaiming Christ. He preached the gospel right where he was. He didn't need to be sent by

any church. He didn't need a special calling. He just simply obeyed and preached Christ right where he was at.

This is the way missions and service works. Some people sit back and wonder, "Why hasn't God called me to some exciting ministry like the Seeley family?" In the past year we've had the Hesse family with us who are just about ready to hop on the plane to Berlin. The Smith family shared

with us about their ministry to Muslims in France. Why has God passed over me? I'd like to do something exciting for the Lord like those families."

We need to be more like Philip. Philip proclaimed Christ and faithfully served him right where he was. And before that, Philip was one of the lead men serving with Stephen in ministering to the Greek widows In Jerusalem. read the beginning of Acts 6 if you don't know what I am talking about. One could say that before he was an evangelist, he was a deacon. Before his evangelistic gifts emerged, his service gifts were in full swing. And the way that people and mission overlap here is amazing. Philip left Jerusalem because his good friend and co-laborer in Christ was brutally stoned to death. Stephen was the first martyr. When Philip left for Samaria he would have still been deeply grieving for his martyred friend, but that did not slow his evangelistic zeal one bit.

Philip exemplifies the principle of being faithful in little. In Acts 6 he served old ladies.

*Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. 2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip...*

How exciting is that? He entered into an ethnically charged issue and was given the responsibility of making sure that all of the widows were cared for equally. It was a ministry to old ladies. Now we love old ladies but most young men don't feel called to full time ministry to old ladies. They just don't! But Philip took that responsibility seriously and served faithfully. It wasn't glorious or exciting ministry. He wasn't on the cutting edge of apostolic ministry. He wasn't out there healing people, raising the dead and preaching to thousands of people at one time. He was doing relatively mundane work of making sure that widows who were on the list should have been on the list. How did they feed these widows? Maybe they had a type of first century food pantry. However they did it, Philip would have been responsible for gathering food from other believers. he would have been constantly asking for and gathering donations. He was a fundraiser of sorts.

Think about how tough that job would have been. On the one hand you had the apostles who needed money to do their ministry. So if you were a poor, brand new believer living in Jerusalem and you had very limited funds to which to give your hard earned money, are you going to give it to Peter and John, who were on the cutting edge of ministry? Peter's first sermon he ever preached resulted in 3,000 conversions. John had been at the right hand of Jesus. Humanly speaking, John was relationally closer to Jesus than anyone on the face of the earth. On the cross, Jesus charged John with caring for his own mother. So if you had a few pennies to give away, are you going to give it to Peter, John and the apostles or are you going to give it to Philip, the guy who takes care of old ladies?

So Philip was an administrator and a fund raiser. Not glorious kinds of jobs. But in the midst of that unglorious ministry, he would have been continually criticized. Here's how Philip's ministry started off. *Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution* (Acts 6:1). Hellenists were Greek speaking Jews and the Hebrews were Hebrew speaking Jews. racially they were essentially the same but they were ethnically divided. It would be like the Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda. The Hellenists and the Hebrews were like two different tribes of Jews. The gospel united them but that didn't stop them from complaining. In fact, had it not been for the gospel, these two groups of people could have just left each other alone. But now they were together, under one roof, as it were, all part of the early church. But they weren't happy. They were complaining. Some had more than others. There may have been truth in their complaints but that did not make the conflict any less real.

So Philip helped to start a ministry that was born out of complaints and criticisms. Have you ever felt called to a ministry like that? "Oh yeah, I love church conflict! I'd like to serve in that ministry full-time. Where can I sign up?" Hardly. So as Philip spent his time in boring administration, impossible fundraising and continual conflict resolution, it may have served a good purpose. It built Philip's service muscles. It matured him and brought him increased faithfulness. And in God's sovereignty the story was preserved for us in holy Scripture, so we are meant to know it and understand it, but once you understand it, you will never again call it exciting and glorious.

When you look at ministry from the outside, it always looks exciting. Who wouldn't like to live in the Bahamas after all? Actually, I think we'd all like to visit for a while, at least as long as we went from our air conditioned cars into our air conditioned, fancy hotel rooms, with an occasional jaunt onto the sandy beach. Yes, that sounds good to us. But few of us would want to live in stifling heat and humidity nine months out of the year with nothing but a ceiling fan for comfort. So from the outside, ministry can look exciting, at least more exciting than our grueling, 9-5 meaningless jobs.

Take camp ministry for example. We have four families in our church serving full-time in camp ministry. If you've ever been to summer camp, you know how fun and meaningful it is. Kids wait 51 weeks on pins and needles until they can go back to camp the next summer. Who wouldn't want to do ministry in the beautiful outdoors in places like Sugar Creek and Living Waters? You get to work with impressionable young children and youth. you get to play games, takes long walks in the woods all while sharing the gospel with everyone you meet. Sounds like Christian utopia, doesn't it?

Listen, please remember to pray for the Allen family, the Hart family, the Hougas family and the Jackson family. Camp ministry is wonderful. They would not be doing it if they didn't love it most of the time. But camp ministry is tough business. Long hours, low pay and sometimes the fruit can seem few and far between. And just like every other ministry and every other church, don't think for a second that they are free of internal conflict. Complaining and conflict follow Christians around like a sad little puppy. When you turn around to pet its soft fur, it will bite you in the hand. But these families are like Philip. They serve faithfully and obediently. And like

Philip, they do mundane tasks like boring administration, impossible fundraising and maybe even occasional conflict resolution.

So if you ever ask the Lord, "Why haven't you called me to something great and exciting?" the real question you need to ask yourself is, have you been faithful in the little that he has given you? That is another foundational principle of stewardship. In Luke 16:10 Jesus said, "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much." God will not give you some exciting, far away ministry or even one across the street until you prove faithful in the little that he has given you.

There's an old saying that says, "God doesn't call the equipped, he equips the called". I like that saying and I think it's true. What it means is that when God calls you to something, you will likely not feel fully equipped for the task, and that's OK. But let me tell you what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that God will call those who are not equipped due to their lack of prior obedience. God doesn't call the faithless, he calls the faithful to greater service and ministry and then equips them more fully.

That's how God works and that's Philip's example as well. He served in obscurity and was faithful in all things and then God gave him a really cool assignment. Did you notice the angel of the Lord's command? *Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.* That's not much to go on, is it? And by the way, the writer Luke adds this sentence- "This is a desert place." We know it was exciting but Philip did not know that, did he? All he knew that he was supposed to start a long walk in the desert. But he did it anyway.

"Yes, Lord, I will. I'll walk into the desert with no idea what is to happen next just because you told me to." No complaints from Philip. He could have said, "wait a minute Lord, I just got to Samaria. I've got a good thing going here. Didn't you see the whole thing with Simon the magician? He repented and got baptized and now you want me to leave Samaria so I can walk through the desert on foot with no destination?" Philip had no idea that he would have this amazing opportunity to witness to a God fearing African traveler who worked for the queen. Philip had no idea that the Ethiopian would just happen to bump into him in the middle of the desert when their paths crossed at just the right moment. Philip had no idea that at that very moment the Ethiopian would just happen to be reading from a scroll of Isaiah at one of the most Messianic passages in all of the Old Testament. Philip had no idea that the Ethiopian would repent and get baptized. Philip had no idea that Luke would later write this down and that 2,000 years later people would be sitting in churches and Bible studies and their bedrooms studying this very story. There was none of that reassurance as to what might happen. Just a command to take a long walk in the hot desert. Philip just said "Yes, Lord." He didn't say it, he just did it. "Yes, Lord."

Maybe it's time for you to respond to the Lord like Philip did. I am guessing that most people in this room have never shared the gospel with anyone. And I don't mean just telling people that you are a believer, although that is the first step. I mean sharing the entire gospel with someone. Not shoving it down their throat but having enough spiritual conversations that at least one of them resulted in sharing the whole gospel with someone. The majority of people have never done this. And for the rest of us, it probably happens once every few years. Are we much different

than the woman in that parable? She claimed to love her children dearly but almost never talked about them.

I want to give you an opportunity to say "Yes Lord." My goal here has not merely been to shame you and send you on your merry way. I want to beg you to share your faith and then we're going to show you how to share your faith. Lord willing, at the end of the summer, we are going to hit the streets of La Crosse and do some street evangelism. Not open air preaching or handing out tracts but engaging people in conversations with a goal of sharing the whole gospel. We would love for 50 people to join us. I know of at least 20 people who plan to go. But before that, we want to train and equip you to share your faith so this summer we will have three equipping sessions to prepare you. If you truly love Jesus but almost never talk about him, will you learn how to do so? Are you willing to say "Yes Lord" to that much?

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April 12, 2015