

Most people who ask, “How can I know God’s will for my life?” are really asking, “How can I find guidance from the Lord for my life choices and decisions?” In Acts 8, Philip shows us. It requires receptivity to the Spirit’s direction and a willingness to accept that direction. Often the guidance we get does not seem to fit our practical ideas or preferences. But the direction from the Lord’s messenger in verse 26 couldn’t be clearer: “*Go South to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.*” Philip already knew that Gaza was to the south, but the instruction to go on the sunbaked Gaza road in the desert seemed strange. The underlying issue is Philip’s obedience. We usually don’t know what our Lord has planned as far as the circumstances into which he leads us, so following his lead requires our total trust.

Unaware before taking the Gaza road, Philip quickly learned that he was going to meet an Ethiopian eunuch. The Lord knew that the royal officer was on his way home from Jerusalem to Ethiopia on the very road Philip was traveling. Traveling at high noon on a desert road was no problem for the African—he rode a chariot. But the Lord wanted Philip at the right place, at the right time to meet him. The eternal life of another person in the worldwide expansion of the Christian movement was at stake.

The Lord often guides us to people and situations we wonder about at the time. Looking back, we see that he used what was at the time a difficult order to follow but that blessings flowed from it. The Lord will use everything available to convince us of a direction—his indwelling Spirit, the Scripture, consecrated thinking, our emotions when they are put at his disposal, the insights of trusted people, and signs in the world around us. When we are willing, he will help us want what he wants for us. The Holy Spirit can steer us when we are on the move with him. Guidance is difficult when we are stopped on dead center with our volitional gearshift set in reverse.

Verse 27 says, “*So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch.*” Notice there were no arguments or even discussion about how hot the

sun might be on that desert road. Following the Holy Spirit's leading comes from a life of regular prayer, Bible study, faithfulness, and openness. Out of the flow of the Spirit, the next move in Philip's ongoing obedience is a feeling of confirmation, not because it's logical but because his closeness with the Lord made it the thing he wants to do. When an opportunity presents itself, Philip is more than ready. What happens to Philip when he meets the Ethiopian gives us a blueprint for how we can share our faith under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Let's look carefully at Luke's narrative of what occurs:

1) The first thing we discover in this particular story is that the Holy Spirit tailors the evangelist's message to the particular needs of the seeker. The way Philip preached to the Samaritans for instance would not have worked with the Ethiopian. Luke tells us a great deal about this man's *position, preparation, problems, and potential*. When we follow guidance from the Holy Spirit to share our faith with another person, we also need to consider things about them. This man on the Gaza road was the secretary of the treasury of the Kandake (i.e., queen of the Ethiopians). He apparently had risen to great power as a leader in the queen's court. That's what we know about his *position*.

The Ethiopian's *preparation* for this encounter was that he obviously had come under the influence of monotheistic Judaism. Perhaps some of the Jews of the Diaspora had introduced him to the historic faith of the Hebrews. It would appear that he was a proselyte because of his long journey from Ethiopia to Palestine to enter the Temple at Jerusalem and receive further instruction in the law. Luke tells us he had come to "worship." The word for worship implies a pilgrimage. His *problem* was that all the services at the temple did not meet his need. The man's *potential* was manifested by the fact that he kept reading Isaiah as he rode along. The Lord could use a man like this Ethiopian!

2) The second thing we learn about sharing our faith is the way the Holy Spirit guides us in the process of showing ordinary warmth and concern for people. Philip's natural inclination was to *care* about this man. Think of all the "chance" encounters we have had in which people respond to genuine friendship. When Philip saw the eunuch's chariot, he was told to run alongside

and engage the man in conversation. I am convinced that our authentic interest in people is surely the Spirit's guidance for us. People don't need to hang a sign around their necks that says, "I need Jesus." We can safely assume that.

What Philip said was an expression of interest in the man. People usually respond to someone indicating they want to know them and about their lives. Find out what a person's interests are, and you have the protruding thread with which to unravel them and to know how to share Christ with them. Philip could see that the Ethiopian was reading was a scroll of sacred Scripture. "*Do you understand what you are reading?*" (v. 30) he sensitively asks. The question implies, "Do you find that meaningful?" The response was filled with discouragement and frustration. "*How can I,*" he said, "*unless someone explains it to me?*" The Greek word for "explain" is a technical word for authoritative teaching and interpretation. Apparently, none of the scribes or Pharisees had explained anything to him while he was in Jerusalem! The concern that Philip showed the man was rewarded with an invitation to sit with him in his chariot.

3) The third thing we discover about authentic evangelism is to start where people are and not where they should be. Philip takes the Ethiopian's lead. He didn't insist on first telling the man about what had just happened to him in Samaria or even about the outflowing of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost but instead he met him where he was. The eunuch was reading Isaiah 53, a great place to begin the story of Jesus. His question indicated that he really wanted to know of whom Isaiah was speaking. Who was this lamb led to the slaughter?

4) The fourth key to sharing the gospel is to allow the Holy Spirit to guide us in *what* to say and *how* to say it. When a person is open and ready, God's Spirit will select from all that we've learned in Scripture and our personal faith experiences to convey the truth. Luke tells us that Philip "*began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus*" (v. 35). What is implied is that the Holy Spirit guided Philip's thought and articulation to help the Ethiopian understand. When we breathe a silent prayer, "Oh, Lord, use me, help me say the right thing at the right time in the right way," he will.

An important lesson from Philip's Samaritan experience was to include the indwelling power of the Lord Jesus in his explanation of salvation. In the last stage of sharing Christ with another person, it is essential to wait for a sign of that person's readiness and response. The most we should do is to gently ask, "Would you like to respond to what we've been talking about?" A pushy demand for a response might turn a person off, or cause them to respond to our pressure instead of the work of the Holy Spirit in them. We might ask, "How would you like to have the love, grace, and peace of Jesus?" Philip never got to a question like that with the Ethiopian. He didn't have to. The Ethiopian himself asks, and his baptism seals the man's faith that reflects what Phillip had just told him. Luke continues the story after the man was baptized, saying, "*the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing*" (v. 39).

I have to wonder. What if Philip thought it was sheer foolishness to go on the Gaza road and walk south in the middle of the day? What if? Some of life's best experiences begin *unexpectedly*. There was a time when a best friend was still a stranger. Did we devise a plan to meet them? No. Great opportunities to help someone or to work together on a project might be waiting just around the corner. God knows about these moments before they happen. Would these experiences happen more often if we listened carefully to what God is saying to us through his Holy Spirit?

Like Stephen, Philip had a way with people. He was sensitive to God's leading. Because of this he found himself walking along a major road taking him from Jerusalem through Gaza toward Egypt and Ethiopia. Soon he hears the sounds of a travelling caravan behind him. He would discover that God had arranged an appointment for him to meet an Ethiopian man, an important officer in the service of the queen of the Ethiopians. After this extraordinary encounter, Philip is whisked away by the Spirit. The Lord had other work for him to do. And Ethiopia now had a Christian secretary of the treasury.

Philip continues his deacon ministry as an evangelist, and Paul stops at his home on his final trip to Jerusalem. But something (or someone) turned Paul

from being a *persecutor* of the church to becoming its most famous *promoter*. That is the next “Acting Lesson” in Luke’s unfolding drama.

Maybe we’ve heard a voice whispering our name. We’ve felt the nudge or sensed the urge to speak. Has that ever occurred to you? We invite a couple over for coffee. Nothing heroic, just a nice evening to reacquaint with friends. But from the moment they enter, we can feel the tension. They’re colder than a glacier. We can tell something is wrong. Typically, we wouldn’t probe, but we feel a concern that won’t be silenced. So, we ask.

Or you’re in a business meeting where one of your co-workers gets raked over the coals. Everyone else is thinking I’m glad that wasn’t me. But the Holy Spirit is leading you to think: This must be very hard for them. So, after the meeting you approach your fellow employee and express your concern.

Any of these circumstances into which God is leading us through the Holy Spirit requires our complete and total trust. Who knows? If the Bible were being written today it might have your name or mine in the 8th chapter of Acts! Amen.