

A Study of the Acts of the Apostles

Week Ten

Acts 8:14-40

Day One

14 When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. 15 When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

v. 14 – God has a sense of humor! When the apostles learned of Philip’s work, they sent John to minister to the Samaritans. This was the same John who wanted to wipe out the Samaritans when they had insulted Jesus:

When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village (Luke 9:53-56).

God has a way of changing you and then letting you know He has changed you by confronting you with your former problem. **Is there a person or certain type of person in your life right now who bothers you?** Then they are there for a reason! And when you don’t need them anymore, they’ll be gone. But to let you know that you are a changed person, God will bring them back into your life now and again (or someone like them) to prove the depth and reality of His work in you!

vs. 15&16 – The Samaritans had believed but they had not received the Holy Spirit. Peter and John came to correct that deficiency. This seems to indicate that receiving the Holy Spirit is a separate experience from salvation, although the Holy Spirit had to be present for anyone to even turn to the Lord in the first place. **Has this been your experience? Do you need more of the Holy Spirit in your life?** Then ask for Him!

If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:13).

v. 17 – To complete the Holy Spirit process and to give John a chance to touch the very people he had tried to wipe out, the apostles laid hands on the Samaritans. Several years ago I decided to touch people more often. I’m not talking about anything weird or inappropriate, but just a gentle pat on the back, hug or touch of the arm to let someone know I care, I’m with them or to even impart some blessing or hope. **Is there someone that you need to touch today?** Don’t put it off. Do it and do it with purpose—a purpose to bless, identify with or assist. In general, are people better off than when they first encountered you on any given occasion? That is my goal when I “touch” people I barely know or with whom I am well acquainted.

Day Two

18 When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money 19 and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." 20 Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! 21 You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God.

vs. 18&19 – This Simon who had believed and was baptized was still one messed-up-in-the-head man. Just because anyone turns to Jesus doesn't mean that their thinking is correct. Simon had a warped sense of power and spirituality and he thought he could pay for the power that Jesus had given the apostles by His grace. There are still people today who believe they can give, pay to attend a seminar or pay tuition to go to school and do what God wants them to do. The giving amounts to a bribe and the payment amounts to a transaction that the person can control. None of those represents a proper response to the things of God. God can't be bribed and godliness or purpose can't be bought.

Don't get me wrong. I'm in favor of giving, training and education. We just have to be careful that we are doing those things for the right reason. Simon had serious heart issues that could only be dealt with by prayer, counsel and discipleship. He was looking for a shortcut that would enable him to bypass the process and keep his status with the people, who considered him a spiritual giant. But Simon was now expected to become a disciple and wasn't ready for leadership.

Leadership is a good thing and anyone who wants to lead in God's church desires a good thing. But there is price for leadership. **Are you willing to pay the price?**

Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding (Proverbs 23:23).

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

What price are you willing to pay to be the leader that God wants you to be? Are you willing to do it His way or are you looking for shortcuts as Simon did?

vs. 21&22 – Peter literally told Simon to go to hell with his money! When I read this, I always feel like Peter overreacted. But tradition has it that this Simon continued to grow

in his perverse spirituality and became well-known throughout the Roman world. So Peter must have discerned something that was seriously wrong and strongly rebuked Simon in hopes that he would turn and repent. The church and believers are sorely lacking in discernment today. Discernment isn't the same thing as suspicion. That we have! **But how can so many leaders do so many bizarre things and have their people empower them to do it?** It's because the people have developed or don't want to develop discernment!

Day Three

22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. 23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." 24 Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me." 25 When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

v. 22 – Peter saw Simon's attitude and request as wicked! He further commanded him to repent! Simon thought the things of God were for sale, sort of like buying the Holy Spirit franchise for Samaria. Simon then would have exclusive rights and that would lead to profits and prestige. Do you think there are any leaders today who are serving God for the money and prestige? I know there are! One was just recently exposed on television as living in a \$12 million home! And when confronted with this reality, he claimed that the Lord told him not to respond. And what's more, he will teach that God wants him to have all that and more, and the people will enable him to get it. I'm not bitter toward this brother, nor am I jealous. But I'm not naïve either! If I were serving as oversight on his board of directors, I would urge him to repent, scale down and invest more in the work of God all over the world and less in himself. Am I being too hard?

v. 23 – I would not have determined that Simon was full of bitterness. Greed, yes. Ambition, yes. Bad attitude, yes. But not bitterness! That's why we need the discernment of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise we will judge by what our eyes see and our eyes can be fooled or lead to misinterpretation. In other words, we need to be like Jesus:

The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD — and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist (Isaiah 11:2-5).

Are you developing discernment or relying on your wits and "street smarts"?

v. 24 – At least initially, Simon sounded like he responded correctly. Or did he? He didn't really do what Peter commanded him to do. Instead he passed on the

responsibility for his spiritual progress to someone else, namely Peter. **Have you passed off the responsibility for your spiritual life to someone else—your spouse, parents, pastor or mentor?** If you have, you've made a big mistake. What's more, you need to take the responsibility back! I've often said and seen one thing happen again and again: It's easier to hear from your pastor or partner than it is to hear from the Lord. And what is why we seek out others instead of God. We lose control when we seek the Lord, because we never know how long or how diligently we will have to seek Him before He responds and then the response will be in a way of His choosing, not ours.

v. 25 – Peter and John made the most of the opportunity, preaching on the way home from their assignment. **Are you effectively using your time?** I find that I don't unless I develop a simple prioritized daily task list every day. That's right, I do that every day. It is the one thing that is the key to my productivity. I write down what I need or would like to do, assign those things a number and letter value (A1, A2, B1, B2, etc.) and then stick with the plan as best I can. More often than not, that enables me to move forward and accomplish my highest priority tasks. **What about you? How is your time management? Are you being effective and efficient, or just busy and frustrated?** You can change that today if you begin to discipline yourself and hold yourself accountable for those things that you know you must do.

Day Four

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road — the desert road — that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

v. 26 – Philip was having successful ministry in Samaria, but the Lord told him to stop and travel on a desert road. There are several things I think about here. First, how did the Lord speak to Him? And that leads to a question for you—**how does God speak to you?** My theory is that God has a certain pattern of how He communicated with you and me, and it is critical that we recognize this pattern. Second, what did Philip think when he was ordered to travel on a desert road? Which leads to another question for you—**Are you carrying out your business or ministry based on the word of God or what makes sense?** Most of the time God will direct us to do things that make sense, but sometimes He will take us out of that routine and take us in a direction that seems to be counterintuitive or counterproductive. At those times, we must do what God orders us to do.

vs. 27&28 – Philip did what the angel told him to do. His destination wasn't a place, however, but a person! God is interested in people and seeing them repent and know Him:

We urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle — I am telling the truth, I am not lying — and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles (1 Timothy 2:1-7).

Who are you praying for? Leaders? People who need the Lord? God is interested in souls and will change your course, just like He did Philip's, so it will intersect with someone who is searching for or needs Him. **Are you willing to change your plans for the one person?**

This Ethiopian was an important official, who obviously was a believing Gentile, of whom there were more than a few who came to Jerusalem to seek and worship, and who worshipped in synagogues if there was one where they lived. God was already revealing Himself to Gentiles, but the Jews and believing Jews consistently had a problem grasping this truth.

Plus there are many who believe that the Queen of Sheba introduced her people to Judaism when she returned from her visit to Solomon! And what's more, some believe that Psalm 45 is a story of her visit to Solomon, and that she also married and had a child to Solomon. If this is true, God certainly works in magnificent ways! And now He continued the work that He had begun 1,000 years earlier by bringing Philip to this eunuch.

v. 29 – The eunuch was reading the book of Isaiah and the Spirit ordered Philip to go up to the chariot. **By the way, what are you reading? What questions are you seeking answers to?** If you aren't seeking or hungry for knowledge and insight, then God won't reveal new things to you. Leaders are readers because leaders are learners. This eunuch was a leader but he was hungry for more; he had questions and God had the answers! There is any exercise I have recommended to people called "100 Questions." It is quite simple; you just take out a sheet of paper and start writing questions that you have, stopping when you reach 100. Why not try to generate your 100 questions today and see what you come up with. When you're done, study the list and see what emerges.

Day Five

30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. 31 "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."

v. 30 -- In those days, people read out loud, so that is how Philip would have known what the man was reading. He “heard” him read. The point here is that Philip got close enough to the man and knew what his questions were. **Are you close enough to people to know what their issues are? Do you care enough to ask? Are you listening for the needs that they have?** This requires that you put aside any of your own needs or agendas and enter into the world of their needs. That is not easy to do.

Each of you should look not only to your own interests , but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:4-5).

v. 31 – This is why I’m spending time writing these studies—to come alongside your pastor and others who are working to explain the Word so that you can understand it. But we can only assist; you must do the real work. And you can do it, because God is with you to teach you. It isn’t me helping you—it’s the Lord! I think this is what John meant when he wrote:

As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit — just as it has taught you, remain in him (1 John 2:27).

Now Paul wrote that a teacher is one of the five-fold gifts, along with apostle, prophet, evangelist and pastor. So John wasn’t saying that we don’t need teachers but that we can’t rely on those teachers to do the work that only we can do in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. **Do you agree with this conclusion?**

vs. 32&33 – The eunuch was reading Isaiah 53, which is such a graphic rendition of Jesus’ life and death, seven hundred years before it unfolded! Yet a veil hung over the reader’s eyes and he could not comprehend who the passage was describing. This is the perfect example of what I was referring to in verse 31. Philip was the teacher and guide, but it was the Holy Spirit who bore witness in the man’s heart and gave him insight. Yet the man had to want the insight and had to accept what the Spirit showed him. **Do you see the relationships here that promote godly learning: a willing and seeking heart, an aware and informed teacher and the work of the Holy Spirit?** Those three team members always make learning fun and exciting!

As I write this, we are approaching the day called Easter. How appropriate it is to read Isaiah 53 at this time! Jesus endured unspeakable horrors to set me free from sin and death. He is worthy of all my praise, my life, and my words. Spend some time today thinking about what Jesus did for you and me, and thank Him.

Day Six

34 The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" 35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. 36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water

and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" 37[And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." NASU]

v. 34 – The Church must do a better job of fielding and answering people's questions. The synagogue had an interactive service, where visiting rabbis were asked to speak and questions were asked. I am trying more and more to take questions, even at times during Sunday morning services. Yes, what a radical concept! But I don't want people going home if I haven't connected with them and met them where they live, so to speak. **What are you doing to answer the questions of those seeking answers, seeking the Lord?**

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15-16).

And we should not be running from the tough questions that confused or angry people may ask. We should be available to answer them all, or find answers as best we can. There is never any shame in not being able to answer a question once, but we should go forward and think about what we should or could have said in order to be prepared for the future.

v. 35 – Philip started with the man's question at Isaiah 53 and told him about Jesus! We need to start with people where they are and take them where they need to go. Notice that the eunuch didn't ask Philip for his credentials or pedigree. The eunuch just wanted someone to answer his questions. A drowning man doesn't interview his rescuer! Don't be so self-conscious. Be God-conscious and conscious of the dilemma that others are in. They are lost and need God, adrift in a sea of confusion and moral fuzziness. **If you don't help the people with whom you come in contact, who will?** And if you don't feel competent to answer people's questions, then do what you have to do to get competent—read, study, rehearse and then read some more. Then engage people where they live.

v. 36 – God was moving quickly in the eunuch's life. He saw water and wanted baptism. Not every situation will end like this, but some will. So just do your part and watch God move in the hearts of people. But the goal isn't just to make them feel good, but to bring them into right relationship with Jesus.

v. 37 – This verse isn't included in the NIV translation and is in brackets in the New American Standard Version. This means that many scholars believe this verse wasn't in the original manuscripts but was added later. Now don't get up in arms that it isn't included. Translators have many challenges as they work to translate an ancient language into modern terms. For the most part, I think they have done a marvelous job. And the instances of this happening in the Bible are rare indeed. But keep in mind that we don't have the original copies of the Bible (autographs as they are called), but rather copies of the autographs. It's a miracle that so much has been preserved so accurately. Don't be disturbed that there have been a few alterations. The same Spirit who inspired

the Bible is protecting the Bible; it is in good hands. And don't ever be uptight about new translations. We need them for a variety of reasons, in spite of what the advocates of the King James Bible may say.

My own feeling is that this verse makes sense and isn't off base at all. So I can include it and even preach about it, because it's consistent with other passages. Let's stop wrangling about minor issues and go out to save the world as Philip did.

Day Seven

38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. 40 Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

v. 38 – The eunuch made a decision then and there to be baptized. You have to admire his commitment to the truth. But he also knew that he was going home and would not have another chance to have someone do this with him. And you have to admire Philip's faith to baptize one and then commit that person to God's grace, not knowing what would happen or how the eunuch would follow through on his commitment to Christ. I have been guilty on many occasions of over-planning or fretting about God's ability to preserve those whom I have led to Jesus. I need not worry; God is able to take care of those who are His:

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen (Jude 24-25).

v. 39 – How did Luke know that the eunuch went on his way rejoicing, since Philip was taken away? Did Luke interview the eunuch at some later time? Or had Philip seen something of the eunuch's joyful condition before Philip was taken away. But Philip couldn't have stayed any longer if he had wanted to, for the Spirit ushered him to Azotus where he continued his evangelistic work.

I have almost always stayed around longer than God wanted me to in ministry situations. Then God had to blow them up, so to speak, to get me to move on. Philip didn't have this problem. I am counseling a man right now who has a significant ministry position, but he is miserable. The only reason he is holding on is for the salary. When your joy is gone in any situation, no matter how important a position or what God did to get you there, it's time to look for other options. In other words, it's time to go! **Have you outstayed your welcome where you are?** Then face reality, trust God and begin to seek Him for your new assignment.

v. 40 – I often work with people who go to Africa and exercise their spiritual gift. God blesses it and then they come home, expecting the same results. When it doesn't happen, they often become frustrated that the church doesn't recognize their gift. My advice to them is simple: God showed them where He wanted them to express their gift and they cannot expect to experience an African anointing in Michigan. That doesn't mean they must relocate there—although it may—but rather they must make Africa their focus for ministry.

Philip was a traveling evangelist and God showed him that he was most effective when he went and left quickly. **How about you? Where are you most effective, and what are you doing when you have ministry success?** Don't take that for granted and don't ever think you can be effective where you choose to be. God makes that choice and it is your job to find out where that is and get there as often as possible.