

Word of Life Lutheran Brethren Church  
Community Group Bible Study – week of Jan. 11  
Acts 8:26-38

*Open with prayer as you begin. Pray specifically for the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind in order to understand God's Word.*

Have you ever been hopelessly lost? Maybe you had sketchy directions from a friend, or you left the directions in another coat. Or even worse, maybe the directions you downloaded from the internet were just wrong! Did you try to figure it out for yourself, or did you stop to find someone who could help you?

Or think about the subjects that you studied or are studying in school. Did you ever have a subject that didn't click with you?

Have you ever felt like that spiritually? Do you feel like that right now?

The good news is that God has not left us on our own to figure things out for ourselves. He has revealed Himself to us and has given us His Word. John 1 says that the Word of God became flesh (human) and made His home with us. God's ultimate revelation is the person of Jesus Christ and He still speaks to us in His written word.

Read Acts 8:26-38

Philip was one of the first Christians and part of the church in Jerusalem. He was one of the seven men given the responsibility of overseeing the distribution of food to widows (Acts 6:1-6). Like Stephen (another one of the seven) he was also an evangelist and preacher.

Have you ever felt compelled to go somewhere for no apparent reason?

Through an angel God directs Philip to go on a desert road heading south. On the way he meets a man with whom he had little in common. Some explanation and definitions are needed to better understand the man who Philip meets in the desert;

*Gaza* is the same region where there is so much conflict going on today. Gaza is in the very south of Israel and borders with Egypt. The man is described as an *Ethiopian*, but should not be associated with present day Ethiopia. At the time Ethiopia was associated with present day Sudan, south of Egypt. He is described as a *eunuch*, which strikes the modern reader as an odd and sad way to describe someone. It is a male who has been castrated, and sadly it was common for officials in a royal government to be castrated. He was not a slave, but a free man in a high position. By putting eunuchs in positions of power, the king was protecting himself. It limited the man's power by ensuring that he could not father an heir who might challenge the king. It

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also ensured that he could not violate a king's wife or harem. *Candace* is not a name but a title for the mother of the king. It was the mother of the king was responsible for many of the day to day maintenance of a royal court. These were things that were considered beneath the king, but obviously it was important that they were done. As the official in charge of her treasury, our friend was a powerful and high ranking official.

If the Ethiopian man was returning from worshiping in Jerusalem he must have been a “God fearer”; a gentile who was not yet a full convert to Judaism. In fact, as a eunuch he would not be allowed to become a full Jew (Duet. 23:1). So picture the scene; here's Philip on the road in the desert, led by God to approach the chariot of this stranger.<sup>1</sup> He boldly asks the man “Do you understand what you are reading?” Do you think Philip may have been a little scared as he approached this powerful man?

Have you ever been timid as you brought up the subject of your faith with someone?

Any apprehension that Philip may have had was put to rest at the Ethiopian's response. Although he was a powerful and important official, he answers Philip with humility and invites him to join him in the chariot. He wants to understand what he is reading<sup>2</sup>, but can't. Can you relate to this man? Have you ever read the Bible without understanding it? Have you ever desired to understand God, but couldn't? Can you think of a time when God led someone into your life to help explain the Word?

Like any good Bible teacher, Philip knows that Jesus Christ is the author and ultimate fulfillment of all scripture, so he leads him through the Gospel story and points him to Jesus. It is important to note that the scripture that Philip uses does not include the NT texts. They had not yet been written. What he used was the OT and the promises that pointed to Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> He must have been a **very** wealthy man. Scrolls were extremely expensive and few private people had copies of the scriptures (something we take for granted). That he was sitting and reading from the text may indicate that he had just acquired the scroll in Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup> The man is reading from Isaiah 53 and the verses quoted are 7&8. It is the 4<sup>th</sup> of Isaiah's “servant songs” and describes the suffering Servant, Jesus Christ. The entire song starts in 52:13 and continues through 53:12.

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Read Isaiah 53:3-12

Can you think of any other passages from the OT that you might use to point someone to Jesus?

After Philip's Bible lesson it seems that he rode in the chariot with his new friend. As they rode along the road the Ethiopian man saw some water and asked an odd question. Rather than simply ask to be baptized, he asks why he *shouldn't* be baptized. Any ideas as to why he might ask why he shouldn't be baptized?

Can you think of some excuses that keep people from fully embracing Jesus today? Are there sins and situations that make people feel like God's grace is not meant for them? Have you ever felt that you were too broken to be saved?

God's grace is not limited to one group or type of people. Jesus died for even the most broken and mutilated of all people. Philip knew this well and welcomed the new convert into God's grace by baptizing him even in the middle of a desert! May we be as gracious and loving to the broken and hurting people that God leads us to every day.

*As you close in prayer take time to thank God that He has revealed himself through His Word and through the witness of His people. Pray that He would continue to empower you through the Holy Spirit to know Him more and more.*