

USER-FRIENDLY CHRISTIANS
ACTS 8:26-40

INTRODUCTION:

- A. I am going try to read your mind this morning!
- You care about people going to hell.
 - You want to take as many people with you to heaven as you can.
 - You are not sure that you have ever personally got anybody to come to Jesus.
 - You suspect and hope that you have been a link in a chain of many influences that contributed to someone coming to Jesus.
 - You are nervous about the idea of “pushing” religion on other people. You anticipate a cool or negative reaction if you bring up Jesus Christ talk.
 - This whole thing about sharing your faith is actually fairly intimidating...
- B. But you really do believe that *GOD IS IN THE BUSINESS OF CONNECTING BELIEVERS WITH SEEKERS!*
- C. Early in the Book of Acts we read these words: **Acts 1:8** *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*
- D. Now we see the first instance of the Gospel witness going ton the ends of the earth—to Ethiopia! *...the ancients regarded Ethiopia as “the end of the earth,” so the gospel reaching this goal announced in Acts 1:8 is foreshadowed here...—Darrell Bock¹*

BIG IDEA: GOD IS IN THE BUSINESS OF CONNECTING BELIEVERS WITH SEEKERS.

So, what do we do with that?

1. SO BE LISTENING— Acts 8:26, *Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south..."*

- Whatever is going on in this story, we know right off it has to be important because God doesn't send angels with messages just any old day.
- Remember Philip? He showed up in Acts 6—as one of the seven godly men chosen to be in charge of benevolence care for Hellenistic widows in the fledging Jerusalem church. [Note: This is Philip the Evangelist, not to be confused with Philip the Apostle.]
- He showed up a second time earlier in this chapter as the pioneer evangelist of Samaria.
- This is Act III for Philip.
- And in this Act, Philip is the main character in a story about God's passion for lost people. And it starts with him **listening** to a message from God.
 - **Acts 8:26** *Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road-- the desert road-- that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."*
 - No reason given—just directions.
 - As we get into the story, it is packed with God's love for lost people—and a plan to get one particular man saved.
 - But it starts with a man **listening** to God.

1. SO BE LISTENING— Acts 8:26, *Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south..."*

- How to Improve Spiritual Listening:
 - **Turn down the noise.**
 - For thousands of years, God's people have had **problems with listening.**
 - **Deuteronomy 4:1** *Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you.*

¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 339.

- **Psalm 81:8** *"Hear, O my people, and I will warn you-- if you would but listen to me, O Israel!"*
- **Isaiah 42:20** *You have seen many things, but have paid no attention; your ears are open, but you hear nothing."*
- **Matthew 13:13-14** *This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. ¹⁴ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving."*
- Philip had an advantage over us—An angel talked to him with a very clear message. But, on the other hand, maybe he wasn't so different from us. I suspect the angel chose him to speak to because he had a heart calibrated to listen to God.
- God's voice to you and me is more subtle—and if we are full of the noise of the world, we're not going to hear him.
 - Here's what I mean by noise:
 - The **passion of God's heart** is that lost people hear the Gospel and get saved.
 - **Jesus' purpose statement: Luke 19:10** *the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*" [The **Zacchaeus** Incident]
 - Jesus' was **passionate about his mission: John 4:34** *"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."* [The **Samaritan Woman** at the Well Incident]
 - So for Jesus, connecting with lost people for salvation was a **white-hot value**.
 - If connecting with lost people for salvation is **not** a white-hot value for me, then I have been distracted by the noise of my world--
 - I get distracted by the noise of my lawn needing to be mowed.
 - I get distracted by the noise of getting to my next appointment.
 - I get distracted by the noise of my selfish protection of my time. Most of us value our time more than money.
 - I get distracted by the noise of reading the newspaper.
 - I get distracted by the noise of finding the fastest line at Costco.
 - This is the noise: My time, my agenda, my druthers, my projects, my problems, my anger, my bitterness, my pain—That I no longer hear the whisper of God nudging me to look around for people who need to hear about Jesus from me.
 - **How does one turn down the noise?** Sure, the lawn still needs to be mowed, but is there something I can do to hear God?
 - **Protect** some "**white space**" for God to speak to me: **Psalm 46:10** *"Be still, and know that I am God..."* [**half-day of prayer**]
 - **Pray for lost people every day**—people we know and people we don't know. We see what we are looking for—and praying for lost people is a powerful way to start seeing lost people.
 - You get a **Honda Accord**—suddenly you start seeing lots of Honda Accords on the road. You never noticed them before. My goodness, a lot of people must have just bought Hondas like me! No, I just see them now.
 - I pray for lost people and I start seeing lost people. I start hearing God's whispers about opportunities to speak to lost people about him. I see the opportunities I was driving by because **my prayer has turned down the noise**.

1. SO BE LISTENING— Acts 8:26, *Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south..."*

- How to Improve Spiritual Listening:
 - **Adjust the dial.**
 - —What station am I tuned in to???
 - I don't have to do anything to hear the broadcasting of the world—somehow it's already messed with my pre-sets.
 - But I do have to adjust my dial for God—and that means being in the Word.
 - **ILLUSTRATION:** *I am a leaky vessel and must always be under the tap.*

- By soaking in the Word of God I start changing my dial to hear the opportunities and priorities of God.
- **Three specific suggestions** for adjusting your dial:
 - **II Corinthians 5**, especially the last half.
 - *We try to persuade men*
 - *God gave us the ministry of reconciliation*
 - *We are Christ's ambassadors*
 - **Read one of the Gospels**—especially looking for Jesus' passion for lost people. I'd recommend Luke.
 - **Memorize Romans 1:16**, *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*

1. SO BE LISTENING— Acts 8:26, *Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south..."*

- How to Improve Spiritual Listening:

- **Pray for divine appointments.**

- Parents of **Linda Collins**:

Ned and Mildred Harless are 95 and 88 years old. They just moved to Warm Beach after 67 years in Aberdeen. Mildred was a kindergarten teacher and Ned was a watchmaker, a builder, and a maintenance worker. But they were also Sunday school teachers for many, many years. About four years ago, Mildred excitedly called daughter Linda Collins to tell her a God-story. Mildred and Ned were feeling like they were just a couple of old folks—mostly stuck in the house, can't get out much anymore. They were feeling pretty useless. But they prayed like this one morning: "God, if there's something you want to do to use us, you're going to need to bring people to us."

Later that morning there was a knock on the door. It was a woman who had been a kid in their Sunday school 40 years before when she was a kid. In her teen and adult years she had walked away from God and lived a pretty hard life. Now she wanted to reach out to God and she asked if Ned and Mildred could help her. Ned and Mildred led her to accept Jesus as her Savior. Then they invited her to join their Bible study group where she has been growing in her faith these past 4 years. She has a voracious appetite for the Bible and is actively sharing her faith.

A week later this lady came to the house with a friend that needed to see Ned and Mildred. They led that friend to Christ also.

- I believe God will speak to us more often **when we tell him** we want to hear from Him.
- **Relax**, not every encounter will be a glory story—It's more like spawning salmon. They lay thousands of eggs and a few survive. We share with many people, and a few respond.
- **JOHN ORTBERG**: *Recently I was on a cross-country flight with three friends who work at my church. The plane was packed, so we could not sit together. One of us threw out a challenge: "Let's see who can have the most significant spiritual conversation with a stranger on the way home." (I work at a high-challenge church.) Some people I know seem to convert fellow airline passengers on a regular basis, but I must fly the wrong airline, because that is certainly not my normal experience.*

The challenge was presented. Now it was up to me to embrace or avoid it.

I sat down and met the man on my left. He was a businessman, hard at work on his laptop and wearing one of the most beautiful suits I have ever seen. He looked like an ad for whatever store ranks above Nordstrom's....

It was not an ideal setting for conversation. The whole plane was testy because it was so crowded and because we were running late.

I greeted him over dinner and was working up to turning the conversation in a spiritual direction. However, I was having a problem getting the salad dressing to come out of its pouch. I applied tremendous pressure, and suddenly the whole thing traveled in one tremendous blob and covered his suit.

It was not a little dab. His pants looked like the skin of a Jersey cow.

It took the flight attendant and me twenty-five minutes to convince him that club soda could get the stain out.

He was in the washroom for thirty minutes.

Now I really wanted to go into avoidance mode. I kept wondering, Where do I go from here? The thought that kept coming to me was, Club soda could get the stain out of your suit; what's going to get the stain out of your soul? But I wasn't sure that approach would be effective.

We talked anyway, and it turned out he was already a Christian...²

- **PRAYER:** *Jesus, I want to get in on the action. I want to bring people with me to heaven to give you more glory. I want to be used of you to help accomplish your mission of seeking and saving the lost.*
 - Why is this prayer effective? Because we are talking to God about the passion of His heart... When we talk to God about lost people, we are know we are praying according to the will of God.
- **II Peter 3:9,** *He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*
 - So I wonder what kind of “Go south” kind of message God wants me to hear from Him?

2. SO BE ACTIVE— Acts 8:27, *So he started out...*

- The first step is cultivating willingness.
 - Philippians 2:13-14, *It is God who works in you to will...*
 - Matthew 26:41, *The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."*
 - I have the greatest dreams—especially during sermons. I hear the Word of God in church and I get all revved up and I can't wait to go into action Monday morning for the Kingdom of God. I'm going to get up at 4:00 a.m. to read my Bible, and I'm going to start discipling my children Monday evening—
 - So I fumble with the alarm and reset it for 6:00 a.m. and that night when I try to do the Bible with the kids after dinner, they start laughing and poking each other.
 - And I think, *I'll wait till another sermon...*
 - The body is weak! Dreams get wrecked so easily on reality.
 - My goodness, It is such a good thing, and such a needful thing that God works on my willingness.
 - Despite my failures and despite my false starts—as I look down the years of my back-trail, I see that God has done some cool things thru me—through his persistent nudging of my inner willingness. I eventually do the things I want to do. And God works to make me want to do his will.

2. SO BE ACTIVE— Acts 8:27, *So he started out...*

- The second step is purposing to act.
 - Philippians 2:13-14, *It is God who works in you...to act according to his good purpose.*
 - But eventually I have to get to action.
 - Philip didn't know why he was going. It was just an unknown point on the map.
 - But at this point in the story, these are powerful words of obedience: ***So he started out...***
 - *So on I go not knowing,
I would not if I might;
I'd rather walk in the dark with God
Than go alone in the light;
I'd rather walk in faith with Him
Than go alone by sight.*³
 - Like Abraham when he left Ur; or when he got up that fateful early morning to go sacrifice his only son, Isaac.

THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

- **Matthew 25:24-27** *"Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' ²⁶ "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.*

² John Ortberg, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 125-126.

³ *He Knows* by Mary G. Brainard, 1869; arr. by Philip P. Bliss, pub.c.1876.

- *Lazy I can understand....But he called him more than lazy. He said he was wicked....This parable establishes God's measure for our lives. God sees not only who we are, but who we can become. When we neglect our God-given potential, it is wickedness in the sight of God.—Irwin McManus*

- THE SEVEN DEADLY STATISTICS—Thomas Clegg and Warren Bird:

FACT #1: The percentage of adults in the United States who attend church is decreasing.

- THE SEVEN DEADLY STATISTICS

FACT #2: Roughly half of all churches in America did not add one new person through conversion growth last year.

- THE SEVEN DEADLY STATISTICS

FACT #3: No matter how you do the math, current conversion rates still point to one horrible conclusion: lost people lose. In America, it takes the combined efforts of eighty-five Christians working over an entire year to produce one convert.

- THE SEVEN DEADLY STATISTICS

FACT #4: Some researchers claim that more churches are closing than are opening every year.

- THE SEVEN DEADLY STATISTICS

FACT #5: Conversions to other religions and dropouts from Christianity are escalating.

- THE SEVEN DEADLY STATISTICS

FACT #6: The decline in Christianity has been going on for nearly fifty years.

- THE SEVEN DEADLY STATISTICS

FACT #7: Too many churching people believe and behave identically to their unchurched counterparts.⁴

3. SO BE EXPECTANT-- Acts 8:27, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch...

- Believe that God is passionate about lost people.
 - Luke 19:10, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."
 - Luke 15:10, "I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."
- The Ethiopian: Probably a black man. A eunuch. Probably not a full proselyte, but a **god-fearer**. As a Gentile, **restricted to the Court of the Gentiles** at the Jerusalem Temple.
 - He had a heart sensitive to the Lord. **Verse 27** says that he ...*had gone to Jerusalem to worship*. He had a portion of Scripture and he had probably paid dearly for it.
 - Candace: not a proper name, but a hereditary dynastic title like "pharaoh" in Egypt.
 - Chariot: Not a battle chariot but a traveling carriage or wagon.
 - Gaza. BOCK: *Gaza was the last water stop in southwestern Israel before entering the desert on the way to Egypt and was 2,400 feet lower than Jerusalem...*⁵
 - Ethiopia: Called Cush in the early Old Testament (see Genesis 2:13). Today it is **Sudan**. South of Egypt. A 5-month journey to Jerusalem.
 - And the God-Factor shows up again: **Acts 8:29** *The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."*
 - **Acts 8:30** *Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.*

3. SO BE EXPECTANT-- Acts 8:27, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch...

- Anticipate that God is already working in lost people.

⁴ Thomas T. Clegg and Warren Bird, *Lost in America* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2001), 25-34.

⁵ Bock, 341.

- Acts 13:48, *When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed.*

- “all who were appointed for eternal life believed.”--Here it refers to God’s sovereign work over salvation where God has assigned those who come to eternal life.... The passive voice indicates that God does the assigning. It is as strong a passage on God’s sovereignty as anywhere in Luke-Acts...—Darrell L. Bock...⁶

3. SO BE EXPECTANT-- Acts 8:27, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch...

- Anticipate that God is already working in lost people.
 - Acts 18:9-11, *One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." ¹¹ So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.*
 - It uses the term people for those who are not yet converted. The saying indicates divine foreknowledge of the success of the Gospel in Corinth.—I. Howard Marshall⁷
- Expectancy--what happening that can only be explained by God?
- Holy Spirit conviction... Believe that the Holy Spirit is working per John 16.

3. SO BE EXPECTANT-- Acts 8:27, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch...

- Embrace that God wants to use us.
 - Acts 1:8, *You will be my witnesses*
 - 2 Corinthians 5:11, *We try to persuade men.*
 - 2 Corinthians 5:20, *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.*

- *Question: What line is fifty thousand miles long, reaches around the world two times, and grows a half-mile longer each day?*

Answer: The line of people in the United States who are currently untouched by your church and mine.-- Thomas T. Clegg and Warren Bird

4. SO BE EQUIPPED-- Acts 8:35, Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

- Quotes Isaiah 53:7b-8a-- **Acts 8:32-33** *"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."*
 - Scroll of Isaiah: Probably 8” by 12” and 16.5 to 145 feet long.
- 1 Peter 3:15 *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...*

- The Ethiopian replies to Philip’s question: **Acts 8:30-31**, *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.*

- *Hodegeo=guide or explain. --...refers in everyday usage to someone guiding someone to another place, such as guiding a blind person, the guidance Moses of God gave the Jews, or being led into wisdom...⁸*

- In those the Jews debated whom Isaiah 53 was talked about: 1) *The prophet Isaiah himself,* 2) *The nation of Israel,* 3) *Another individual, such as an Elijah revived or a Messiah, but not one who suffered...⁹*

⁶ Bock,

⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 296.

⁸ Bock, 342.

⁹ Bock, 344.

- **Acts 8:34** *The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?"*

4. SO BE **EQUIPPED**-- Acts 8:35, *Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.*

- *Philip euangelleoed the Ethiopian. He "gospelled" him. He "good-newsed" him.*
- *The Romans Road:*
 - *The Human Situation: Romans 3:23, All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*

- *The Romans Road:*
 - *The Desperate Consequence: Romans 6:23, The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

- *The Romans Road:*
 - *God's Rescue Plan: Romans 5:8, But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

- *The Romans Road:*
 - *My Urgent Response: Romans 10:9-10, If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*

- *The Missing Verse 37: ^{NAS} Acts 8:37 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."*

- *Acts 8:37 was added by a second century scribe, probably because Luke made ...no mention of a confession of faith by the eunuch.... Nevertheless, ...although the verse is not original, it is one of the earliest witnesses for how confession took place in the church, being written sometime just after the composition of Acts.—Darrell Bock¹⁰*

THE CLIMAX OF THE STORY

- **Acts 8:36-38** *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 ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.*

- Another soul ushered into eternal life. An influential political figure now a missionary for the Lord in Africa.
- No one of us knows what is going to happen when we wake up in the morning—but as for me, I want to live more expectancy of what God is going to do by sticking me into His passion for lost people.

Timothy G. Walton
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¹⁰ Bock, 348.