

Acts 8:26-40
Spirit-Led Mission
ACTS: HTCWP

Introduction

Tim. Pastor. Sup. Lent guide - fasting reminder: background noise (music, podcasts, radio, etc).

Acts 8. We're gonna start in vs 4 then hop over to our main story in vs 26.

If you've been coming around our church for any amount of time, hopefully you've heard us say once or twice our mission statement as a church. This one sentence that encapsulates everything we are going for as a church family. And that is this: **Citizens Church exists to be a Jesus-centered Family on Mission with Him.**

We want to be centered on the person and work of Jesus.

We want to live as a family.

We want to live on mission - taking the gospel to those around us where God has put us.

But the part of our mission statement that I want to focus on today is the last two words: **"WITH HIM"**

Those two words are crucial for how we understand and think about mission as a church and crucial to us understanding and applying what we are going to read today in Acts 8:26-40. When we step out in faith bringing the gospel to those around us and beyond, when we live on mission we do not do so:

- **For God.** As if we owe Him something or can give Him something He doesn't already have.
- **To please God.** As if He can love us more based on our actions, when we already have the fullness of His good pleasure and love through faith in Christ.
- **Without God.** As if it's up to our power and strength to make things happen and to lead people to Christ.

We live on mission *with God*. Here's why I can confidently say that: We serve a *missionary God*. God is constantly at work in the world redeeming, reconciling, and making all things new in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. That's the whole storyline of Scripture, God pursuing and rescuing a people for Himself. So when we think about mission, we shouldn't think about something we make happen or have to stir up, mission is much more about *joining God in His redeeming work in the world*.

I love the way Christopher J.H. Wright puts it when he says: **"It is not so much the case that God has a mission for His church in the world, as that God has a church for His mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission – God's mission."**

God has a mission, and He invites us to join Him as the Holy Spirit leads, directs, guides, empowers, equips, and encourages God's Church for the sake of the gospel spreading across our city and across our world.

And that's what we're going to be looking at today: ***The Holy Spirit leads ordinary Christians for the spread of the gospel.***

I want to walk through this passage together drawing out some things we can learn from the story of Philip that will help us **better understand what it looks like for us to follow the Holy Spirit into the mission of God. A framework for us to understand what it means to step into a life of Spirit-led mission with God.**

Intro to Philip

Reminder: To frame up where we've been - last week Cole talked about how the church had established 7 deacons to oversee it's mercy ministry - the care for the poor, widows, and orphans within the church so the apostles could focus on preaching and prayer. Stephen, one of those deacons is killed for his faith and it kick starts this great persecution against the early church such that everyone except for the 12 apostles are scattered.

And today we're introduced to Philip. Another one of the first 7 deacons in the church. Who in the persecution heads down to Samaria.

Acts 8:4-8:

4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. 5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. 6 And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was much joy in that city.

Persecution happens. Philip goes to Samaria. He's healing people, preaching the gospel. And basically a mini-revival breaks out in this place.

This is the first thing I want us to see this morning:

1. Holy Spirit led mission is the call of every believer.

I wanted to start here because in just a second, Philip is going to get a very specific call and burden from the Holy Spirit to go to a specific place and share the gospel with a specific person. Spirit shows up and is like - "PHILIP, GO"

But that's not always how it works. There's no evidence of an overwhelming burden or feeling or prompting or voice in Acts 8:4. Philip just leaves Jerusalem so he doesn't get killed, and is like - "well I guess I'll go to Samaria and start preaching there."

Philip doesn't need this crazy Spirit-filled calling, some vision or dream of prophecy from the Lord. He just knows - I'm a follower of Jesus. **So wherever I go, and wherever He has me, I'm going to be a witness there.**

Here's what we can learn from this - **You don't need to wait to "feel led" to a person, place, or situation to start living on mission.** You can just start going for it. In Samaria, there was no record of direct Spirit prompting. Philip wasn't just sitting and waiting on that one. He stepped out in faith. **There was an initiating power to Philip.**

In fact, I think that's part of why the Spirit is going to show up in a second to Philip with some clear instructions of what to do - because he's already being faithful to live into his God-given identity as a witness for Christ.

Biblically and in my own experience often the Spirit of God looks less like a starting block and more like a redirect. When the people of God are already living as a witness, trying to share their faith, serving people around them, living in community, reading and meditating on God's Word, pursuing the Lord, looking for opportunities, and the Spirit speaks and redirects their focus and attention. To use a sports analogy that some of y'all will get - **the directing of the Spirit is often much more of an audible than a play call.**

Let me say it this way - One of the barriers I hear the most right now to mission is how to build relationships during this time of covid. Working remote, masks, social distancing, all of that. And there's a way to approach this that is passive and resigned - I'm just gonna sit back and wait for God to open a door. Or there's a way to have some Spirit-empowered creativity, scheming for how you might engage those around you, how you might go make some friendships in new spaces that you wouldn't have ever thought you'd enter.

Sometimes we just need to start acting and trying and throwing things at the wall and seeing what sticks, and other times, the Spirit makes Himself very clear, like we're about to see...

Acts 8:26-27

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.

In light of what's going on at this time in Philip's life, this doesn't make sense...at all.

- He's leading a crazy **revival** in Samaria where God is moving and people are getting saved.
- He's told by God to go to **Gaza**. First Century Gaza was this out of the way, forgotten about place. No one, especially a Jewish person, would ever want to go there. It was dangerous, dirty. Not a place you wanted to be.
- AND to top it all off, Gaza was a **Philistine** city. The Jewish people (Philip was Jewish) **hated** the Philistines. They were bad people, they were enemies of Israel. Remember Goliath from the David and Goliath story? Goliath was a philistine. Bad news.

2. Holy Spirit led mission often involves risk.

This was way inconvenient and way out of Philip's comfort zone. It made no earthly sense. God is moving and working in Samaria, and I don't even like those people and it's so far away and it's the desert, it's hot, it makes no sense.

But that's often how the mission of God works.

God calls us to go somewhere and at first thought it's like - I don't want to go there, Lord. Anywhere but there! Anyone but those people.

But God doesn't see people or places like we see people or places. His heart is for the lost in those places we reject. He has people that He is planning to save in those places we reject. He has people He wants to redeem and bring to Himself in those people groups we despise. Those people that we turn a blind eye to because they're not like us.

And in His kindness, through His Spirit, God would actually turn our hearts and give us a vision and a love and a burden to reach those people with the good news of the gospel such that we couldn't imagine doing or being or living out our lives anyway or anywhere else.

Local - For some of you, this might mean places here in this city you never thought you'd go for the sake of the gospel. Taking up hobbies you'll never actually enjoy because it gives you a chance to meet people you'd never meet otherwise. Stepping into places that seem uncertain. Stepping into relationships with folks that are hard to get along with. And seeing how the Lord changes those places and changes your heart.

Nations - For others of you, this is going to mean leaving Charlotte for the sake of God's Kingdom and taking the gospel to the nations. Some of y'all are like - "But I literally just got here. Or maybe you've been here 5+ years. Feel like you're thriving. Have some sort of ministry. Love living here. And God's thinking, this isn't it → **I have another place for you.** Maybe it's somewhere you would never think you'd want to go, ever. Northern Africa. Slums of India. Post-Christian London or Berlin. For the sake of the gospel.

Holy Spirit led mission often involves risk.

Let's keep going....

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.”

So Philip is on this desert road, heading to Gaza, probably scratching his head wondering what's up, when along comes this chariot with an Ethiopian eunuch inside.

- Now today Ethiopia is a fairly small country, but at the time, Ethiopia accounted for everything in Africa south of the Nile river. HUGE area. And this man was the treasurer over all of it. He's very powerful, very important.
- He was also a Eunuch. A eunuch was a servant of the queen, and when you signed up for your role, you would be castrated, so that the king could trust you around the queen that you wouldn't do something you weren't supposed to do. (got more questions on that - you can send an email to our intern walkerbyrd@citizenscharlotte.com).

Socially it would make no sense for Philip to approach this man. **Different backgrounds. Different social statuses. Different ethnicities and countries of origin.** Already it's a risk for him to head to Gaza. Now on the road to Gaza, he's led by the Spirit to this man who is different in every way from Philip. But Philip is listening.

3. Holy Spirit led mission requires listening to God.

As we've already said time and time again the Holy Spirit plays a prominent role throughout the book of Acts. He shows up about 60 times in the book, and of those 60 times, 40 of them involved Him speaking.

- Sometimes in Acts He speaks through a word of prophecy through someone else in the church.
- Sometimes it's a divine vision or a dream.
- Sometimes it's God-given yearning, this sort of longing within a person that they can't ignore.

The voice of the Spirit is all over this passage - Philip, go to Gaza, go to this man, leading him forward.

But this wasn't just a book of Acts thing - **The Holy Spirit is still speaking today...** Most often, I would argue, through this, God's Word, but also through God's people/our Christian community, through prayer, maybe through dreams or through even an audible voice, and sometimes through steady promptings or pressings within our soul.

But here's the problem — we don't live lives with space to hear Him.

We are constantly in a rush. Here and there. Moving and going. Cramming our minds with entertainment and noise and busyness. We live in an overstimulated age where we feel this pressure to fill every single open moment with more and more content and distraction.... **And then we wonder why it feels like the Holy Spirit isn't speaking to us.**

Saturday morning. “What did you say?” Do we do the same thing with God?

The Holy Spirit is still speaking today.

The question for us is - **are we willing to listen or are we too distracted, busy, or even afraid?** What would it look like for us to slow down today? To stop and to listen. To put away distraction and busyness and be sensitive to the mission God is inviting us into.

Do we have the courage to listen to the Spirit? Do we have the strength to create the margin to hear from Him? And how might He then lead us into the mission of God?

- When we're walking in the neighborhood and we feel the Holy Spirit **press** on us to go say "hi" to that neighbor we've never met, do we listen?
- When we're in the coffee shop, and someone sitting next to us is reading a religious book, and we **sense an urge** from the Spirit to ask them a question, do we step out in faith and courage or do we shy away?
- That coworker that the Holy Spirit keeps **bringing to your mind** during these sermons on mission or during your prayer time, are you too distracted getting your work done, or are you going to go message them and initiate conversation?
- Are you entering each day praying and asking the Holy Spirit to **guide** you and **give** you opportunities to share the gospel?

The Spirit is still leading the people of God, are we willing to listen? Do we have ears to hear? That's why this **fasting practice** for us this week is timed so perfectly - fasting from background noise. One way we might create margin this week to be still and silent before God and see how He might lead us.

Pastor Eugene Peterson - "The assumption of spirituality is that always God is doing something before I know it. So the task is not to get God to do something I think needs to be done, but to become aware of what God is doing so that I can respond to it and participate and take delight in it."

How do I become aware? By listening. To God in His Word. In Community. In prayer.

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."

Here's our 4th point. I want to give it then explain it:

4. Holy Spirit led mission meets people where they are and gives them the good news of Jesus.

Philip, led by the Spirit, approaches the chariot and hears the man reading from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. And the passage he's reading is **Isaiah 53:7-8**. Isaiah 53 reads like an eyewitness account of the crucifixion of Christ, except Isaiah writes it 800 years before it actually comes to fruition.

Right before verses 7+8 are verses 5+6 which say this about the coming Messiah -

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53 - talks about this sacrificial lamb who dies for the sins of God's people.

Isaiah 54 - talks about this eternal covenant of peace, this future time of unmatched blessings for God's people in God's presence.

Isaiah 55 - talks about the compassion of God, and the fact that God's people take part in the work of God as He brings about new creations and new believers.

So in just 3 chapters in Isaiah right where this man is reading on a desert road to Gaza - we read there is a sacrificial servant who will atone for His people, He will bring about a new covenant of peace and a new creation.

34 And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”

Let me tell you why the man asks this question in vs 34.

This Ethiopian man is undoubtedly wrestling with the idea of God. He traveled all the way to Jerusalem to go to the temple and worship. He's obtained a scroll which has the book of Isaiah written on it, which would have been hard to do. It's not like going on Amazon and ordering a \$3 Bible. He's invested money, time, energy. He's reading it, he's searching. He's asking questions.

He would have traveled all the way from his home city to Jerusalem seeking God (most likely about 1500 miles. Like traveling from Charlotte, NC to Denver, CO. In a chariot), he's seeking and searching but when he got to the temple there would have been a sign out front of the outer court of the temple that said **“No lame, no blind, and no eunuchs may enter here.”**

What do you think is going through his head at this moment? Maybe he's regretting what he's given up to work for the queen? He got a prominent position but what did it cost him? He now finds he can't enter the temple - the presence of God. Is there any hope for him? Can he have a relationship with God? Can he be reconciled?

But this is what the man would have read as he continued in Isaiah. **Isaiah 56:4-7:**

4 “For thus says the Lord: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, 5 I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. 6 “And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—7 these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” (Isa 56:4-7)

He just got to the temple to be told he can't enter into the presence of God but Isaiah says that one day because of this sacrificial lamb we read about in Isaiah 53, that one day he too could be brought to the holy mountain of God, he too could be welcomed into God's presence.

The Ethiopian must be sitting there wondering - Is this for me? Is this good news for me? Can I actually be saved and welcomed into the people of God? Will I be welcomed into the presence of God? Can I be forgiven? Can I be washed clean? Can I be made new? Can I have a new identity and a new name written forever in the book of life?

Check out vs 35:

35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

You can't pick a better scripture to jump to Jesus from, especially for this man, than Isaiah 53-56. And Philip's like “THIS IS CRAZY.”

- **I can just imagine Philip, led by the Spirit, walking up to the chariot - “Why am I on this road to Gaza? Who is this guy? What are you doing Lord?”**
- Hears him reading Isaiah 53 - “Do you understand what you are reading?” No? Let me tell you...
- You know that Mosaic law, you keep trying to live up to by visiting the temple and doing these rituals, even though you're not a part of the Jewish people. Let me tell you the truth, they can't live up to it either. None of us can. It's not just the act of sinning that makes you guilty, it's your whole heart. Your heart is wicked and sinful.

- You can't live up to that law, but let me tell you who did. **His name is Jesus.** And listen, Eunuch, let me tell you what else - Jesus not only lived perfectly according to the law, he also died the death you deserved for your disobedience. Because one day you will stand before God and face punishment for everything you've done, but Jesus took that punishment for you. Jesus stepped in your place and died for you, and unless you think He's dead - let me tell you 3 days later God brought Him back to life. And he defeated satan, he defeated death, he defeated sin. And if you would turn from your ways and trust in Him, He would wash you clean from all of your sin, failures, mistakes, disobedience and make you right with God so that you could live with Him forever.

Word to non-believers in the room: Some of you in the room are where this man is in the passage. You're wondering, asking - is this all true? Is it real? Did this stuff actually happen? Can I be saved? Did Jesus die for me? Is there an answer for the longing and gnawing in my soul? Is there forgiveness of sins?

And I want to tell you, just like Philip told this man - **yes there is hope for you, and His name is Jesus.** Who took your faults and wrongs and shortcomings and sin upon Himself. Who took the punishment that you deserved. And if you believe in Him and trust in Him, in this very day, this very hour, this very moment - you can be forgiven of your sins, washed clean, and made right with God. Stop running, stop chasing after all these things that will not satisfy. Turn to Jesus.

For believers in the room:

There are people all around you every single day asking these same questions this Ethiopian man on the desert road is asking: "Am I loved? Am I worthy? Do I matter? Am I enough? Can I be forgiven? Is this whole God thing real?"

And the Spirit has put you where He has put you for these people. **Like He sent Philip, He's sending YOU!**

Are you willing to listen and be obedient? To meet them where they are and give them the good news of Jesus.

- **But I don't know the Bible like Philip does, I could never jump from Isaiah 53 to Jesus** - Ok let's get you studying the Bible. Get a good study Bible, let's start reading and studying.
- **But I don't know what's going on in the hearts of people around me and how to speak to that** - Ok, first step for you is to start being a good friend. Ask some questions. Take an interest in them and their soul.
- **But what if I mess up, I don't share the gospel correctly or stumble over my words** - Valid concern. We want to get the gospel right. We have several evangelism tools that will help you explain the gospel to people. They're on a website on the ACTS sermon series page. This week your application is to go study and learn how to use those.

The Spirit is sending you. This is too big of a deal to just sit back. Listen, step out in faith. Let's get going.

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.

5. Holy Spirit led mission expects God to save.

The man gets saved. Ancient historian Eusebius says this eunuch (and his servants) went on to plant the first church in Africa. Before there are even the first white, Western, European converts in Acts, we have a thriving church meeting in the capital of Africa. Christianity ain't a western thing, just saying.

Meanwhile Philip, the text says, is "carried away by the Spirit of the Lord and finds himself in Azotus". Did God teleport Philip? Maybe. Definitely some kind of miraculous travel.

Either way, he suddenly finds himself in a new city, Azotus, about 20 miles away, and look at what he does - **as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.** Keeps on preaching. Keeps on expecting God to work and move, more people to become Christians, get baptized, churches planted, gospel spread. Expectation.

God has people in our city, in our state, in our country, and in this world that He wants to save. So we can go expectant that the Spirit is going to move and work and save people.

H.S. led mission:

- **Is for every believer**
- **Often involves risk.**
- **Requires listening**
- **Meets people where they are and gives them Jesus**
- **Expects God to save.**

Interview w/ Sarah B.

Here's how I want to close. I want to give y'all a picture of this from our own church family. I'm going to invite up Sarah, one of our covenant members, to share a little bit about her story of how the Spirit is leading her on mission in her workplace. (clap)

Questions:

1. Tell us a little bit about yourself, how long you been in Charlotte, what you do, etc. (Nurse, 2 years, etc.)
2. Now, I want to talk about how the Spirit is leading you on mission in your workplace with your coworkers, but will you first tell me about the conversation you had with Walker after your first day of work? ("I'm not going to have any friends...")
3. So safe to say you didn't approach your job with some crazy strategic missional plan? When did the Spirit start to shift your heart and give you a vision for what He could do? (Visible fruit, good convos and good questions with coworkers finding out where they were with faith)
4. What are you seeing the Spirit do now through you? (Chance to glorify Christ/Spirit here, can talk about fear/worry/"despite me")
5. How can we pray?

Pray. (*Band comes up during prayer*)

Communion + intro into worship.

Cut Things:

Holy Spirit led mission starts with good questions.

I don't want to spend long here I just want to say - sometimes we're afraid to share the gospel because we think it's a presentation. Sometimes the best way to share the gospel is through genuine, loving, and courageous questions.

Dan, golf course (Joke at Cole about the importance of golf). "Tell me more."

"The best evangelists are the most inquisitive."

Are you pressing in and having these deeper heart-level conversations to know how the gospel speaks directly to what's going on in their hearts?

And are you able to apply the good news of Jesus, are you able to speak the gospel, to those heart level questions?

This is part of the reason why reading and studying and even memorizing Scripture is so important. To meet people where they are and speak the gospel into that, you have got to know your Bible. You need to see that your personal study of Scripture is **evangelism training**. It prepares you to meet people where they are, sharing Christ with them in ways that will resonate.

God uses His Spirit, His Scriptures, and His people. That's how He saves. That's why we teach the Bible. That's why you need to know the Bible. That's why you need to be sensitive to the Spirit. Philip was both "prayed up" and "studied up". If part of your fear in evangelism is that you're worried people will ask you questions you don't know...pray - seek the Spirit, trust and lean on Him to give you the words, but also **STUDY!**