

Gifted¹ for Service: Philip



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 13

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Acts 6:3; Acts 8; Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:1–11; 1 Corinthians 27–31; 1 Timothy 3:8–12.

MEMORY VERSE: “The crowds listened to Philip. They saw the miraculous signs he did. They all paid close attention to what he said” (Acts 8:6, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: Through Philip’s ministry (work), Samaria is turned upside down by the good news. Then, Philip helps an influential² Gentile (non-Jew) Ethiopian give his life to Jesus. When we fully give our lives to God, there is no limit to what He may do through us to move His kingdom forward.

PHILIP HAD TO FLEE ATTACKS against believers in Jerusalem. He faced a magician and cast out demons. He healed those crippled and paralyzed.³ He led a rich Ethiopian from the royal court to Jesus and baptized⁴ him. And the Holy Spirit moved him across long distances. Life for Philip was not dull at all.

When many people think of Christianity, they think of lists of dos and don’ts (do nots) and bored-looking people with long faces. But these images are not true. Following Jesus is the most exciting life possible.

This week we will study the exciting life and mission (service; calling) of Philip. He personally shared the good news of Jesus in Samaria. And through Philip’s work, the continent of Africa received the gospel (the good news about Jesus) too. What can we learn from his story?

1. gifted—having a special skill or ability to do something.

2. influential—having a good or positive effect on someone or something.

3. paralyzed—when a person is not able to move parts of his or her body.

4. baptized—to be put completely under water and brought back up again. This shows that Jesus has forgiven this person’s sins and has given him or her a new life.

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 14**CALLED TO SERVICE (Acts 6:3)**

The church in Jerusalem chose Philip and six other men to serve as deacons, or servants. The Greek word for deacon, *diakonos*, is translated as servant in other parts of the New Testament (in the King James Version and many other translations). When Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples (followers), He said, “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant [or your deacon]” (Matthew 23:11, KJV). And in foretelling His death, Jesus said, “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant [or deacon] be” (John 12:26, KJV).

From reading Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8–12, how do we judge the character⁵ of Philip?

What kind of picture do Acts 2:46, 47 and Acts 4:32, 33 show of the church at that time?

The good times did not last. Soon a big crisis arose (read Acts 6:1). At this time almost all the new believers were Jewish. But there were two kinds of Jews: the Grecian (Greek) Jews and the Hebraic (Hebrew) Jews. The Grecian Jews were not born in Israel. They spoke Greek. And their way of

thinking was Greek. The second kind, the Hebraic Jews, spoke Aramaic and/or Hebrew. Their worldview was strictly Jewish. As the church grew fast, the Grecian Jews complained that when food was shared with people, their widows were overlooked in favor of the widows of the Hebraic Jews.

So, the church was faced with their first big problem from within the community.⁶ The 12 apostles⁷ met together and established a plan for good church leadership: sharing responsibility. Then the work of the deacon was created.

How much time does your local church waste dealing with members fighting among themselves? How can you help the local church direct its energy toward reaching the lost instead?

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 15**MISSIONARY TO SAMARIA
(Acts 8:1–5)**

When Philip reappears in the Bible, we find him in Samaria, the area north of Judea. Jesus had foreseen that His followers would become missionaries⁸ not only in Jerusalem but “in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NIV). Now Philip is part of the fulfillment of

5. character—who someone is; all the things that a person does, feels, and thinks are what a person is made of; your character is the sum of the choices you make, such as a choice to be honest or to cheat.

6. community—a group of people living, working, or worshiping together.

7. apostles—the disciples (followers of Jesus) who preached and taught the gospel (the good news about Jesus) after Jesus returned to heaven.

8. missionaries—persons sent out by a church to spread its religion in a foreign country.

this prophecy.⁹ But perhaps it is not in the way he and the other believers would have foreseen.

The leaders did not send Philip to Samaria as a missionary. He was not part of the early church's Global Mission (worldwide service) plan to reach unentered areas.

What events in Acts 8:1–5 caused Philip to flee to Samaria? What did the scattered believers do when they fled?

After the stoning of Stephen, Saul's attacks against the Christian church grew stronger. So, all the believers, except the 12 apostles, scattered. This is the first example we find in history of the underground church. Many times since then God's faithful followers have been driven into hiding for their faith. Even today, in many parts of the world, Seventh-day Adventist believers are forced to worship in secret.



Philip fled to Samaria when the attacks against the Christian church grew stronger.

As they scattered, these believers “preached the word wherever they went” (Acts 8:4, NIV). This may be strange, but attacks against Christians forced the good news to spread more widely. What other examples of this happening can you think of?

This was a terrible time for the early Christians. They were forced out of their homes and scattered to foreign areas. They were living in fear of further attacks. Philip was the father of four daughters, and this probably would have been a stressful time for his family (Acts 21:9). But, no matter how difficult the situations were, Philip and the other Christian believers continued to share the good news of Jesus faithfully.

The believers had troubles. But they continued to work hard to spread the message. Why? Because they had a sense of mission,¹⁰ of purpose. Why are so many of us lacking that same sense of mission? Could it be because we are too busy looking inward and not outward? Are we too busy thinking of our own needs and not the needs of a lost world? Think about this and be prepared to discuss your thoughts on Sabbath.

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 16

OPPORTUNITIES (CHANCES) FOR WITNESS (Acts 8:26–39)

9. prophecy—a message from God about what will happen in the future.

10. mission—the special duty (work) for Jesus that a church sends a person or a group out to do.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we often speak of finding an opening for our mission. Because of prejudice, we cannot quickly start speaking about Jesus or the Bible. People often put up “blocks” as soon as we start talking about spiritual (holy) things. The health message often has broken down “blocks” in many parts of the world. Personal friendship is perhaps the best way of reaching people. When we become friends with people, they often start to ask us about our Christian beliefs.

Read Acts 8:26–39, the story of Philip and the eunuch,¹¹ and then answer the following questions:

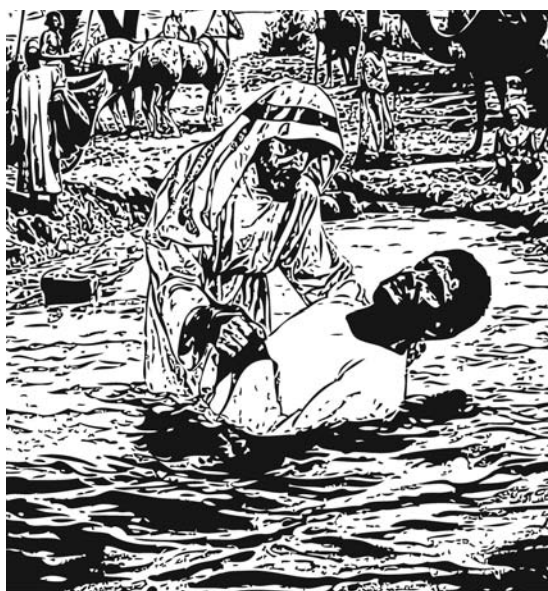
❶ What led Philip to go where and when he did? What important message do you learn from your answer?



Philip shares the gospel with the Ethiopian leader.

❷ What method did Philip use in order to start witnessing to the eunuch? What need did Philip help fulfill for the eunuch? What important lesson can we learn from this too?

❸ What was required of the eunuch so that he could be baptized? What message can we learn from this for ourselves?



The Ethiopian asks Philip to stop and baptize him.

The Ethiopian had gone to Jerusalem to worship. And maybe he was returning home disappointed. He quickly would have discovered that, as a Gentile and as a eunuch, he was disqualified from worshiping in the court of the Jews (read Deuteronomy 23:1).

But now, new light breaks through his discouragement as he learns about Jesus, whose death has “destroyed the

11. eunuch—a man whose testes (male sex organ) have been removed.

hatred that was like a wall between us” (Ephesians 2:14, NIV). Inspired by the wonderful news he hears, the eunuch asks Philip to baptize him. And here we read of the first recorded Gentile convert to Christianity—a wealthy and powerful African.

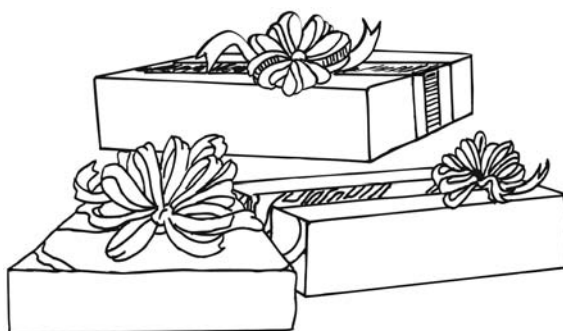
How often do you have opportunities to witness for your faith? How well do you use those opportunities? What could you do better?

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 17

GIFTED FOR SERVICE (1 Corinthians 12:1–11)

Each of us as followers of Christ is given spiritual gifts¹² to do the mission God has for us. Spiritual gifts were important in the life of the early Christian church. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers that he did not want them to be ignorant about spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1). The Greek word Paul uses for gifts, *charismata*, shows that these are gifts of grace.¹³ We do not earn them. Instead, we receive them as gifts.

The fifth fundamental belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church points to the work of the Holy Spirit. It says,



Jesus gives each of us spiritual gifts to do God’s work.

“He extends [gives] spiritual gifts to the church.” This is an important idea we need to understand. God gives gifts through the believer. But the gifts are really for the church. Spiritual gifts are never given just for the purpose of individual believers. They are always given for the profit of mission and service. Spiritual gifts are given to believers through the wider church community. In this way they can help the church in its mission to the world.

The story of Philip’s experience in Samaria (Acts 8:4–8) is not detailed. At some time God gave Philip extra spiritual gifts, because he changed from Philip the deacon to Philip the evangelist.¹⁴ It must have been an important step for Philip to go from managing the church in Jerusalem to casting out demons and healing the sick in Samaria.

12. spiritual gifts—the gifts the Holy Spirit gives us when we become born-again. These gifts are to be used to help serve Christ’s church. First Corinthians 12:1–11 gives a list of what those gifts are: leadership; wisdom; knowledge; faith; healing; the working of miracles; prophecy (foretelling the future); speaking in different languages; interpreting (explaining) the meaning of other languages. Different people have different gifts. Some people have more than one gift. But all gifts come from the Holy Spirit to help the church.

13. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

14. evangelist—a Christian who preaches the gospel (good news) of Christ to many people at one time.

The two important places for our understanding of spiritual gifts come from Romans 12:6–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:1–11, 27–31. Read these verses and compare¹⁵ them with Acts 8:4–8. What spiritual gifts did Philip show? And how did he use them?

“The crowds listened to Philip. They saw the miraculous signs he did. They all paid close attention to what he said” (Acts 8:6, NIV). We may not be able to do miracles, as Philip did. But what principle (rule) is seen here? What is it about us, our lives, our teachings, that would cause anyone to pay close attention to what we say?

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 18

PHILIP AND SIMON MAGUS (Acts 8:9–25)

The apostles in Jerusalem heard of the great success in Samaria. So, they sent Peter and John to visit Philip and the new believers. Peter and John both arrived in Samaria at the right time to support Philip. They first prayed for the new believers to receive the Holy Spirit—something that, apparently, Philip had not done. Then they helped Philip deal with a former magician named Simon.

Read Acts 8:9–25 about the story of Simon, Philip, Peter, and John. Then answer the following questions:

① Why are miracles not always the best proof that God is directly behind what is happening?

② Simon wanted the right thing, just in the wrong way. Or did it look that way? (After all, what is wrong with wanting to give the Holy Spirit to others?) Judging by Peter’s feeling, what might have been the true reason why Simon asked for the gift of the Holy Spirit?

③ In what way was Peter’s feeling toward Simon almost the same as Jesus’ feeling toward Peter? (Read Matthew 16:21–27.)

④ Where do we find, in this story, the grace of Christ and the gospel¹⁶ of forgiveness?

No matter how gifted Philip was, even he needed help. This explains why Peter and John came. The important point is, no one is good enough or gifted enough to do the work of the Lord alone. We all need the help of others.

Wanting to buy the power of the Holy Spirit? Come on! Yet Simon was said to be a believer, and he was even baptized. What kind of foolish things did you once believe early in your walk with God that you now no longer believe? How could this help you be more patient of those who do not know any better but might be holding foolish beliefs too?

15. compare—to show how two things are the same.

16. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news of salvation.

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 19

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “The Gospel in Samaria,” pages 103–111, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“Here we have an example of the care of God for his children. God called Philip from his successful ministry in Samaria to cross the desert and go to Gaza to labor for a single questioning soul. How quickly the eunuch accepted the gospel and acted upon it should be a lesson to us. God shows that we should be ready in accepting and confessing Christ, ready in obeying Him, and in answering the call of duty. The eunuch was a man of high standing. He had a high and responsible position. Through his conversion the gospel was carried to Ethiopia, and many there accepted Christ. And many came out from the darkness of heathenism¹⁷ into the clear light of Christianity.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, volume 3, page 305.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ As a class, talk about your answer to Monday’s final question. But before you do that, it would be better to dis-

cuss your answer to Sunday’s final question.

❷ Early on in the Lord’s church, there were quarrels among people from different areas. In different parts of the world, almost the same problems appear among church members. What about in your own local church? How can you as a person help your church understand just how wrong these attitudes¹⁸ are to every principle of the Bible?

❸ Philip baptized the eunuch just after he accepted Jesus as his Savior. Why does the Seventh-day Adventist Church not do the same today? Should or should we not? Defend your answer with verses from the Bible.

❹ What are some of the needs in your community that your church could use to reach people with the gospel of Christ? How could you help your church in the crucial (important) area of outreach?

SUMMARY: Philip gives another powerful example of what God can do through somebody who has dedicated his or her life to Jesus. Philip witnessed to the eunuch. And He shared with the Gentiles in Samaria. But Philip’s one goal was to uphold the name of Jesus.

17. heathenism—the worship of false gods or idols.

18. attitudes—ways of thinking, acting, or feeling.