

# Gifted *for* Service: Philip



SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Acts 6:3; Acts 8; Rom. 12:6–8; 1 Cor. 12:1–11, 27–31; 1 Tim. 3:8–12.*

**Memory Text:** “And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did” (*Acts 8:6*).

**Key Thought:** Through Philip's ministry, Samaria is turned upside down by the good news, and an influential Gentile Ethiopian comes to Jesus. When we surrender our lives to God, there is no limit to what He may choose to do through us to advance His kingdom.

Fleeing persecution, confronting a sorcerer, casting out demons, healing those crippled and paralyzed, converting a rich Ethiopian from the royal court, being physically transported long distances by the Holy Spirit—life for Philip was anything but dull.

When many people think of Christianity, they picture long sermons in church, lists of do's and don'ts, and bored-looking people with long faces. These stereotypes, of course, could not be further from the truth. Following Jesus is the most exciting life possible.

For example, this week we will be looking at the exciting life and mission of Philip, a man whose world took on a totally new dimension when he was ordained for service. Chosen as one of the seven deacons for the early church, Philip took a course he could never have predicted. He personally shared the good news of Jesus in Samaria and, indirectly, with the continent of Africa.

**What** can we learn from his story?

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 20.*

## Called to Service

The church in Jerusalem chose Philip and six other men to serve as deacons, or servants. The Greek word translated here as deacon, *diakonos*, is translated as servant in other parts of the New Testament (in the King James Version and many other translations). Speaking to the crowds and to His disciples, Jesus said, “But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant [or your deacon]” (*Matt. 23:11*). And in predicting His death, He 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*).

**Read** Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8–12. From these scriptures, what assumptions can we make about the character of Philip?

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**Read** Acts 2:46, 47; 4:32, 33. What kind of picture do these texts present of the church at that time?

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The good times did not last, however. Eventually, a major crisis arose (*see Acts 6:1*). Although at this stage almost all the new believers were Jewish, there were two major types of Jews: the Grecian Jews, who were not born in Israel, spoke Greek, and approached things from a Greek cultural outlook; and the Hebraic Jews, who spoke Aramaic and/or Hebrew, and their worldview was strictly Jewish. As the church grew rapidly, the Grecian Jews complained that when food was distributed, their widows were overlooked in favor of those of the Hebraic Jews.

Faced with their first major problem from within the community, the 12 apostles met together and implemented one of the key strategies of good leadership: delegation. The role of 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?**

## Missionary to Samaria

When Philip reappears in the biblical record, we find him in Samaria, the area north of Judea. Jesus had predicted that His followers would become missionaries 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 this prophecy but perhaps not in the way he and the other believers would have predicted.

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

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

After the stoning of Stephen, Saul’s persecution of the Christian church grew stronger, and all the believers, except the 12 apostles, scattered. This is the first example we see in history of the underground church. Many times since then we have seen God’s faithful followers driven into hiding for their faith. Even today, in many parts of the world, Adventist believers are forced to worship in secret.

**As** they scattered, these believers “preached the word wherever they went” (*Acts 8:4, NIV*). Ironically, persecution ensured that the good news spread more widely. What other examples of this happening can you think of?

This was a terrible time for the early Christians—forced from home, scattered to foreign areas, living in fear of further attacks. Philip was the father of four daughters, and no doubt this would have been a stressful time for his family (*Acts 21:9*). And yet, despite their difficult circumstances, Philip and the other Christian believers continued to share the good news of Jesus faithfully.

**Despite the trials, the believers worked hard to spread the message. Why? Because they had a sense of mission, 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, 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.**

## Opportunities for Witness

As Adventists we often speak of finding an entering wedge for our mission. In many places we cannot, because of prejudice, immediately start speaking about Jesus or the Bible. People often put up barriers as soon as we start talking about spiritual things. The health message often has broken down barriers in many parts of the world. Personal friendship is perhaps the most effective entering wedge. 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, and then answer the following questions:

**1** What prompted Philip to go where and when he did? What important message is there for us in your answer?

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**2** What entering wedge did Philip use in order to start witnessing to this person? That is, what need did he help fulfill for the eunuch? What important lesson can we take away from this, as well?

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**3** What was required of the eunuch in order for him to be baptized? What message can we take away from this for ourselves?

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The Ethiopian had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and the chances are that he was returning disappointed. He would have quickly discovered that, as a Gentile and as a eunuch, he was doubly disqualified from worshiping in the court of the Jews (*see Deut. 23:1*).

Now, new light breaks through his discouragement as he learns of the One who, through His death, has “broken down the middle wall of partition” (*Eph. 2:14*). In response to 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?**

## Gifted for Service

Each of us as followers of Christ are given spiritual gifts to accomplish the mission God has for us. Spiritual gifts were vital in the life of the early Christian church and fired the missionary zeal of the new believers. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers and told them that he did not want them to be ignorant about spiritual gifts (*1 Cor. 12:1*). The Greek word Paul uses for gifts, *charismata*, emphasizes that these are gifts of grace—totally unearned by us.

The fifth fundamental belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit, says: “He extends spiritual gifts to the church.” This is an important concept. Although the gifts are given through the believer, they are really gifts for the church.

Spiritual gifts are never given merely for the benefit and edification of individual believers. They are always given in the context of mission and service. Spiritual gifts are given to believers in the context of the wider church community, so they can benefit the church in its mission to the world.

The account of Philip’s experience in Samaria (*Acts 8:4–8*) is not detailed. At some stage God gave him extra spiritual gifts, and he changed from Philip the deacon to Philip the evangelist. It must have been a significant step for Philip to go from administering the church in Jerusalem to casting out demons and healing the sick in Samaria.

**The two main biblical sources for our understanding of spiritual gifts come from Romans 12:6–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:1–11, 27–31. Read these passages and compare with Acts 8:4–8. What spiritual gifts did Philip display, and how did he use them?**

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**“When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculolous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said” (*Acts 8:6, NIV*). Even if we are not able to perform miracles, as did Philip, what principle is seen here? What is it about us, our lives, our teachings, that would cause anyone to pay close attention to what we say?**

## Philip and Simon Magus

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard of the tremendous success in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to visit Philip and the new believers. They both arrived in Samaria at a providential 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 sorcerer named Simon.

**Read** Acts 8:9–25, the story of Simon, Philip, Peter, and John, and then answer the following questions:

**1** Why are miracles and other supernatural manifestations not absolute proof that God is directly behind what is happening?

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**2** Simon wanted the right thing, just in the wrong way, or so it seemed. (After all, what is wrong with wanting to bestow the Holy Spirit on others?) Judging by Peter's reaction, what might have been the true motive for Simon's request?

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**3** In what way was Peter's reaction to Simon similar to Jesus' reaction to Peter? *Matt. 16:21–27.*

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**4** Where do we see, in this section, the grace of Christ and the gospel of forgiveness?

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No matter how gifted Philip was, even he needed help, which 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 to bestow 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 know better about? How could this help you be more tolerant of those who, in their ignorance, might be holding foolish beliefs, as well?**

**Further Study:** Read Ellen G. White, “The Gospel in Samaria,” pp. 103–111, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.

“In this instance we have an illustration of the care of God for his children. He called Philip from his successful ministry in Samaria, to cross the desert and go to Gaza to labor for a single inquiring soul. The promptness with which the eunuch accepted the gospel and acted upon its belief should be a lesson to us. God designs that we should be prompt in accepting and confessing Christ, prompt in obeying him, and in answering the call of duty. The eunuch was a man of good repute, and occupied a high and responsible position. Through his conversion the gospel was carried to Ethiopia, and many there accepted Christ, and came out from the darkness of heathenism into the clear light of Christianity.”—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 305.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- 1** As a class, talk about your answer to Monday’s final question. In fact, before you do that, it would be better to discuss your answer to Sunday’s question.
- 2** Early on in the Lord’s church, ethnic divisions arose. Even today, in various parts of the world, similar tensions exist among church members. What about in your own local church? How can you as an individual help your church see just how contrary to every principle of the gospel these attitudes are?
- 3** Philip baptized the eunuch immediately after he accepted Jesus as his Savior. Why does the Adventist Church not do the same today? Should or should we not? Justify your answer.
- 4** What are some of the needs in your community that your church could use as an entering wedge in order to reach people with the gospel of Christ? How could you help your church in the crucial area of outreach?

**Summary:** Philip provides another powerful example of what God can do through somebody who has dedicated his or her life to Him. Whether witnessing to the eunuch, sharing with the Gentiles in Samaria, or converting Simon the sorcerer, Philip’s one goal was to uphold the name of Jesus.

## Salwa's Blessing

Salwa was a faithful wife and mother living in a displaced persons camp in southern Sudan. Women were not allowed to worship in the mosque, and she knew little about God. Then she learned that some Adventist lay evangelists were holding meetings in the camp. She asked her husband for permission to go to the meetings. When he learned that Adventists have many beliefs in common with Muslims, he allowed her to go to the meetings.

Salwa shared what she was learning with her husband, and soon he joined her. She learned that she was a sinner but that Jesus had come to forgive her and save her. She stopped brewing and selling alcohol, and soon her back pain, caused by carrying heavy loads of wood used to prepare the beer, was gone.

Salwa gave her heart to God and asked to be baptized. Her husband didn't object, for he saw the differences in her since she learned about Jesus. She shared her new faith with other women in their homes and in the marketplace. Her enthusiasm was contagious, and several of her friends began attending church. Some even brought their husbands.

When Salwa began attending the church, it had only four members, but within a year the church had grown to 32.

Salwa's friends, Hidia and Alima, had new babies and couldn't attend the meetings, so Salwa shared with them what she was learning. Later these women began attending the church. Alima earned a living brewing beer, as Salwa had. She, too, stopped making alcohol and found another way to earn money. When people came to buy Alima's beer, she told them she was no longer making it. People asked questions, and more people learned about God's love and salvation.

Sadia, one new convert, sums up the feeling of these women. "We fled here because of war, but here we have found peace in Jesus. I thank God that I had to be displaced by war in order to meet the Savior and have His peace."

When it is again safe to return to their own villages, many will take with them a faith they found during a time of war, a faith in Jesus, who brings peace to their hearts.

Your mission offerings help support the lay evangelists who serve God in Sudan and many other countries around the world. Thank you for your part in bringing peace to troubled hearts.

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*Salwa has returned to her home village near Bahr Naam, in southern Sudan, where she continues sharing her faith.*