



Session 9
Summer 2020
Multiage

Philip and the Ethiopian official

ACTS 8:4-8, 26-40

prepare



PRAYER

God, no one is beyond your reach. Help me to be your arms and feet. Amen.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

To know that all people are welcomed to worship God

STORY SUMMARY

Philip went to Samaria, speaking about Jesus and performing signs. An angel told Philip to go to the Jerusalem-Gaza road. The Spirit led Philip to an Ethiopian official traveling by chariot and reading from the scroll of Isaiah. Philip ran up beside him and asked if he understood what he was reading. Philip explained the good news about Jesus. The joyful official was baptized, and Philip was whisked away by the Spirit.

teaching tips for multiage

The Ethiopian official didn't hesitate to ask for help in understanding Isaiah's words. The same is true for children. The question "Why?" easily rolls off their tongues. Learning is a source of pride. And children are willing to teach what they know. Let Philip and the Ethiopian be an example of how God wants us to both learn and teach about Jesus.

During the Retell option in Explore, the children tell the story as a drama. A performance is always more fun when there's an audience. Arrange with the youth or an adult group to sit in to watch the drama.

Decide which Explore options to offer. Check Supplies and To do throughout this session to see what needs to be prepared.

A skilled storyteller, Luke introduces major characters by first giving them minor roles in another story. Stephen and Philip are listed among the seven men about whom we hear only that they are selected to serve tables (Acts 6).

Later, Stephen dominates chapter 7 in a sizzling sermon that brings on his martyrdom. Many Hellenists [HEL-uh-nists] then flee further attacks, and in the first part of this week's passage, we find Philip fulfilling Jesus' prophecy in Acts 1:8: "You will be my witnesses in . . . Samaria." Many Samaritans embrace the gospel and in the process receive generous health benefits.



Epiphany at noon

After Philip's success with crowds, it takes an angel to convince him to trek down the lonely road between Jerusalem and Gaza. In verse 26, should Philip "go south" or, per NRSV footnote, "go at noon"? Noon is more likely, suggesting an experience of brilliant clarity rather than blazing heat. This is not a sizzling desert road but a *deserted* stretch of the road.¹

An unexpected clip-clop breaks the silence. Around the bend comes a horse pulling an elegant chariot in which an African official is reading a Greek scroll. Philip flags down the chariot just as the official reads the suffering servant texts in Isaiah 53. This is Spirit-directed hitchhiking at its best!

The Ethiopian eunuch

We know this man as a eunuch, a court official, and treasurer of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He is coming from Jerusalem, where he was worshiping. Socially, he is far above Philip and is wealthy enough to own an entire scroll of Isaiah. As an Ethiopian, he commands respect. He belongs to the Napata-Meroë kingdom located south of Egypt, known in Greek and Roman lore as "the ends of the earth." According to Homer, the gods and goddesses went there for vacation. The Greek historian Herodotus praised the "burnt-skinned" Ethiopians as the tallest and most handsome of all humankind.²

Is he Jew or Gentile? Most people assume Gentile, but this is questionable. Why travel all the way to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh? We have evidence of Jews—Joseph, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel—occupying high places in pagan courts. Still, he may be a God-fearing Gentile attracted to Israel's monotheism and ethics.

But as a worshiper of Israel's God, the eunuch is marginalized. Castration of promising slaves was not uncommon in the pagan world at that time. Eunuchs served valuable roles as guardians of female harems and as chief administrators for royalty, for whom the inability to produce heirs rendered them nonthreat-

ening. But to Jews, with their strict gender roles and stress on marriage and procreation, eunuchs were the epitome of male shame. Mosaic law is clearly stated in Deuteronomy 23:1: "No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord." This high-class official could come to Jerusalem, but he could never enter the temple.

What is to prevent me?

Philip links Isaiah 53:7–8 to the crucified Jesus. Philip surely also would have explained the servant song of Isaiah 56:1–8, where eunuchs who "maintain justice" should not say, "I am just a dry tree." They will receive "a name better than sons and daughters . . . that shall not be cut off." This promise, says Philip, is now actualized in the reign of God come through the Messiah, Jesus. Such shockingly inclusive theology prompts the eunuch to ask Philip when they come to some water: "What is to prevent me from being baptized?" Answer: nothing! Philip baptizes him, and the fully accepted eunuch goes "on his way rejoicing."³

1. In contradiction to the NRSV and NIV, there is no wilderness here.

2. Homer, *Iliad* 1:423–34; Herodotus, *History* 3:30.

3. Some traditions of the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia trace its origins to this event.

gather

supplies

- *Shine Songbook and CD* (or digital versions)
- *Annual Shine Songbooks*
- CD player
- Sticky notes
- Battery-operated or regular candle, matches

resource pack

- Bible memory poster (Ephesians 3)

to do

- Prepare sticky notes and cover the Bible memory poster where indicated in Bible memory.

media connections

- Music video “Welcome to the Family—Actions” posted by youkat07 (YouTube)
- *Philip and the Ethiopian: Acts 8:26–40 for Children* by Martha Streufert Jander
- Internet search for video “John 3:16” from Sven-Erik Simonsson
- “Lego Philip and the Ethiopian” by Josh Carroll (YouTube)
- “How Great Is Our God (World Edition)” by PassionVEVO (YouTube)

BUILD COMMUNITY

Teaching and learning from each other strengthens a community. As a group, try to solve a riddle. The children can only ask yes or no questions to find the answer. Use the riddle below. *Answer:* a river.

I’m always running, yet I stay in the same place. I can be both smooth and rough. Some go fast and some go slow. What am I?

WORSHIP TOGETHER

Light a candle and invite the children into a time of silence. Let the silence settle for about a minute, then pray about spreading the message of God to others. Sing or listen to “Many Voices, One Song” (track 2, page 4).

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Spending time with God’s Word helps us grow closer to God. Read aloud the Bible memory passage. Invite children to think about what the verses are saying to them. What questions do they have? What feelings does the passage inspire? Let the children sit with the memory passage for a few minutes. Then ask them to sit with a partner and, if willing, share their thoughts.

Bible memory

When we don’t understand what we’re reading, it can look like gibberish. Change the crossed-out words in the Bible memory passage below to the words in italics, writing them on sticky notes and covering the original words on the Bible memory poster. Ask the group to “translate” the passage using their memory or a Bible.

Now to him who by the ~~power party~~ at work within us is able to ~~accomplish~~ eat abundantly far more than all we can ~~ask~~ swallow or imagine, to him be glory in the ~~church~~ basement and in Christ Jesus to all ~~generations~~ swimming pools, forever and ever. Amen.

—Ephesians 3:20–21

experience

SHARE THE STORY

Ask a child to find Acts in the Bible; use a bookmark for nonreaders. Before reading the story, divide into groups and assign one of the following words and responses to each group. (In smaller groups, everyone can do all the responses.) Practice the responses before beginning the story.

Jesus: *Tell me more*

Chariot: *Clickity-clack*

Water: *Gurgle, gurgle*

Reading: *Words, words, words*

Read the story from page 288 in *Shine On*. Groups should be alert to give their responses when they hear their assigned words. After reading, use your finger to trace the possible route between Jerusalem and Gaza on the map from the resource pack.

WONDER AND REFLECT

Reflect on the story together, pondering the following questions. Leave space for silent reflection, responses, and questions from the children.

- I wonder what made Philip so good at telling people about Jesus.
- The Ethiopian was reading something he didn't understand. How do you feel when you read something you don't understand?
- I wonder how long Philip traveled with the Ethiopian.
- I wonder if Philip was surprised that the Ethiopian wanted to be baptized.
- I wonder who the Ethiopian told about Jesus.

PEACE NOTES

Everyone belongs to God. What a message of great news! And great news just wants to be shared. Ask the children to think about how they would spread the story of Jesus to all four corners of the world by traveling to the four corners of your meeting space. Provide sticky notes and crayons. The children can draw or write what they would tell the world about Jesus on a sticky note and then post it to the wall.



Philip and the Ethiopian official

Acts 8:4–8, 26–40
Shine On, p. 288

supplies

- Bible
- *Shine On: A Story Bible*
- Sticky notes
- Crayons

resource pack

- Map

explore

CREATE

The Ethiopian official was happy after Philip taught him about Jesus and baptized him. Ask the children to draw an image of happiness on paper using markers. Spray water or use a paintbrush to add water to the picture. Observe how the water makes the colors bleed, adding interest to the drawing.

supplies

- Paper
- Markers
- Water
- Spray bottle/paintbrushes

MOVE

God's word spreads from person to person. Try passing a movement from person to person. Stand in a line, shoulder to shoulder. The first person in line begins a movement that spreads through the rest of the line person by person, such as raising arms above head, squatting, clapping, rubbing stomach, jumping, and so on. Let each person have a turn being the first person.

RETELL

Perform the readers theater "Philip and the Ethiopian official" from page 1 of the Multiage leaflet. Assign the parts of Narrator, Philip, Angel, Ethiopian official, Spirit, and Reader. Provide a scroll, two chairs to serve as the chariot, and a blanket to serve as the water.

For smaller groups: Combine the parts of Narrator and Reader and the parts of Spirit and Angel.

supplies

- Multiage leaflet
- Paper rolled into scroll
- Two chairs as chariot
- Blanket



LEAFLET

Look at the scripture verses in different languages in "Many places, many languages" on pages 2–3 of the Multiage leaflet. This would be a good time to watch the John 3:16 video listed in Media connections to hear the verse spoken in other languages. Children can exercise some strategy in "Spread the word" on page 4. One possible solution is listed on page 84 of this guide.

supplies

- Bibles
- Multiage leaflets
- Pencils

other ideas

- Make a scroll and write the memory passage or a favorite scripture inside.
- Experiment with water. See how water rings start small and grow, just like our role in spreading God's word.
- Take a look at early Bible translations. This activity sheet can be found at www.ShineCurriculum.com/Extras.

bless

PRAY

Gather together in a circle. Ask two children to mark with stickers the categories on the “Faithful followers” poster from the resource pack that fit Philip and the Ethiopian official (Philip—*New Testament, public speaker, traveler*; Ethiopian official—*New Testament, traveler, had a supporter*).

Then stand and pray the People’s prayer together from the “Ways to pray” poster from the resource pack.

God, we come together to worship and learn about you.

(Link elbows.)

We praise you in our joys.

(Stand on tiptoe.)

We support each other in our sorrows. *(Bend knees.)*

In your love we meet *(step in)*,
and in your love we part.

(Step out.)

Be with us as we go.

(Unlink elbows.)

Shine through us as we live.

(Raise arms.)

Amen. *(Lower arms.)*

leader’s closing prayer

Philip didn’t ignore the angel or resist the Spirit. He was open and available to do God’s work. Can you give up your day’s agenda for God?

Dear God, it’s laughable when I think I know what the future holds. I want to revel in the mysteries you reveal each day. I want to embrace letting go and being led. Amen.

SEND

Send the children with these words from Mark 16:15:

And Jesus said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation.”

Make sure to send leaflets home with the children.

supplies

- Multiage leaflets
- Small stickers

resource pack

- “Faithful followers” poster
- “Ways to pray” poster



Jesus provides a powerful example of inclusion. He welcomed the opportunity to interact with those on the margins of society, whether prostitutes, tax collectors, lepers, or even children.

—Steve Sider
Waterloo, Ontario