

Unit 30

New Life in Christ

Acts; Epistles

Memory Verses

“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

—COLOSSIANS 3:2-4

Proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: The Holy Spirit leads God's people to proclaim the gospel of Jesus from the Scriptures so that others might be saved.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: Acts 8:26-40

As a kid, I loved to watch Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen play basketball for the Chicago Bulls. My favorite play to witness was an inbound alley-oop designed by Coach Phil Jackson. Mike would inbound the ball as if he were shooting it toward the basket, and almost out of nowhere, Scottie would appear leaping toward the basket and slam the ball that Jordan threw in. That amazing shot was always a crowd-pleaser.



How might an inbound alley-oop play help to illustrate aspects of evangelism?

Group Time

Point 1: Obedient to Follow the Spirit's Guidance (Acts 8:26-29)

²⁶ An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip: “Get up and go south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is the desert road.) ²⁷ So he got up and went. There was an Ethiopian man, a eunuch and high official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to worship in Jerusalem ²⁸ and was sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading the prophet Isaiah aloud.

²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go and join that chariot.”

When God delivered His instructions to Philip, He did so with authority and a sense of urgency. His commands in this passage remind us that God does not make suggestions or proposals—He expects to be obeyed by His image-bearers. Yet we are far more eager to embrace God as Savior than submit to Him as Lord. By contrast, the immediate obedience of Philip is striking. He did not delay, question, or ask for greater detail, as compared to other persons greeted by angels in the Scriptures (see Judg. 6:11-40; Luke 1:5-25). He simply got up and went.



What are some reasons we might struggle to obey the Lord's commands?

When God calls us to share the gospel, He directs us to all kinds of people. Here the gospel's destination was the heart of a powerful Ethiopian eunuch. The gospel belongs in the narrow corners of the ghetto and the hallowed halls of government. The gospel's power is applicable in both the rural countryside and the bustling metropolis. God cares to reach both the struggling single parent and the wealthy social elite. In Acts 8 we get a glimpse of the gospel's reach to the world.



What are some reasons we may find it difficult to share the gospel cross-culturally?

Point 2: Faithful to Show Jesus Through the Scriptures (Acts 8:30-35)

³⁰ When Philip ran up to it, he heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you’re reading?”

³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone guides me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the Scripture passage he was reading was this:

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb is silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who will describe his generation? For his life is taken from the earth.

³⁴ The eunuch said to Philip, “I ask you, who is the prophet saying this about—himself or someone else?” ³⁵ Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning with that Scripture.

While the eunuch was sitting in his chariot, He was reading the prophet Isaiah. He understood the words but had questions about what they meant, which is where Philip would come in. Yet God was already at work before Philip came to the chariot. The Lord was softening the heart of this eunuch through His Word even as He was sending Philip to speak the gospel to that same heart. When we obey God’s command to evangelize, we will discover that God has already arranged the circumstances.



How have you witnessed God preparing the hearts of people to hear and believe the gospel?

Philip wanted to know if the eunuch understood what he was reading in Isaiah about the Suffering Servant (Isa. 53:7-8). The eunuch’s answer reflects the universal condition of all humanity: How is the world to understand the meaning of the Scriptures without guidance or insightful spiritual leadership (1 Cor. 2:12-14)? In his response, Philip demonstrated what it means to be a faithful witness with the Scriptures. Evangelism is not merely an explanation of the text but the proclamation of a person—Jesus Christ—about whom all the Scriptures speak.

Preservation of Scripture: God has chosen to reveal Himself to humanity through the text of Scripture, having _____ it and directed it to be _____ from _____. God has also acted providentially throughout the course of history to ensure the biblical text is faithfully preserved for future generations.

Point 3: Bold to Encourage Commitment to Christ (Acts 8:36-40)

³⁶ As they were traveling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, “Look, there’s water. What would keep me from being baptized?” ³⁸ So he ordered the chariot to stop, and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him any longer but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip appeared in Azotus, and he was traveling and preaching the gospel in all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Proclaiming the gospel involves a God-given boldness, as does encouraging someone to commit his or her life to Christ in faith. But we should have a good standing from which to call someone to this commitment. Believers themselves have decided to follow Jesus, and this account of the Ethiopian eunuch shows that there are people, by God’s grace, who will hear the gospel, believe, and obey in faith. The announcement of the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection for our salvation demands a decision, so we should boldly call for one.

Voices from the Church

“Faith means abiding in Christ ... it means receiving Christ ... and therefore embracing him in total trust. Such trust is always a costly thing, because it involves us in surrendering our lives to Christ.”¹

—Sinclair Ferguson

 What are some reasons believers can call people to faith in Christ with boldness?

When Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch came across water on their journey, the new believer asked to be baptized. Baptism is a significant part of the believer’s commitment to Christ. There is nothing inherently special or profoundly spiritual in the water. Believers are baptized in obedience to Jesus’ command as a sign of our purification from sin by faith in Jesus and the public identification that we now follow Christ, our crucified and risen Savior (Rom. 6:1-5). The gospel message demands a response of allegiance, so believers must be bold to share the gospel and bold to call people to faith, to baptism, and to lifelong obedience to Jesus.

My Mission

Because we have received new life in Christ and have committed to following Him, we seek to be available and obedient to the Spirit's prompting, able and willing to show Christ in all the Scriptures.

- **What has God taught you through His Word that you need to believe and act upon in faith?**
- **How might the Holy Spirit be leading your group to minister to people in your community in the name of Jesus and with His gospel?**
- **To whom is the Holy Spirit leading you personally to share the good news of Jesus, the Savior of sinners?**



Voices from Church History

"Because *He is not silent* ... I am invited to ask adequate and sufficient questions and then believe Him and bow before Him metaphysically in knowing that I exist because He made man, and bow before Him morally as needing His provision for me in the substitutionary, propitiatory death of Christ."²

—Francis Schaeffer
(1912-1984)

Notes

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Acts 8:1-8

We are prone to think persecution against the church is limited to the legislative decrees of our day or that the mistreatment of the Lord's beloved is relegated to a subtle rejection on social media. But it can be much closer than that. The terror inflicted on the early church came from within its religious heritage. Saul the Pharisee was a master exegete, a meticulous zealot, and an ardent student of the tradition. Yet he was blind to the movement of God. Jesus and the New Testament writers even warned against false teachers infiltrating and distracting His church (Matt. 24:9-13; 2 Pet. 2:1-3). Our greatest opponents may be those we once considered allies. Even worse, we ourselves can be deterrents to the spread of the gospel.

So let us pray: Lord, cause me to see evangelism as core to my Christian identity. May my sharing of the gospel find its root in a heart that is first captivated by You. I surrender and submit my mind and will to Yours. May I stand amazed at the miraculous outcomes of the gospel shared. And make me eager to experience the power of Your Holy Spirit.



How can you prepare for and respond to false teachers in the church?



Voices from Church History

“‘The persecution,’ he says, ‘gained strength.’ True, but especially then it delivered people who were previously possessed. For it planted miracles like forts among them. Even the death of Stephen did not quench their rage, but rather increased it. It dispersed the teachers, so that the discipleship became greater. There was joy, although there had been great lamentation.”³

—Chrysostom (c. 349–407)

Day 2: Read Acts 8:9-25

Everybody has their price, as they say. Some of us sell ourselves cheaply for the things we want, the power we desire, or the prestige we crave. The question is not if you have a price but rather to which lord will you sell yourself, and does that lord have a price?

Simon the magician thought the Holy Spirit was for sale. That's a tragic assumption that lingers in the hearts of those who love the power of God but reject the person of God. God so loved you and me that He sent His Son so we might be purchased with His precious and infinitely valuable blood. By the way, that's the only currency worth the price of your life. Rather than trying to buy God off for His power and prestige, this passage encourages us to surrender ourselves fully to His intention for our use. That's a magic that money cannot buy.



What are the things that vie for control over your life? What steps will you take to fight against those distractions?

Day 3: Read Acts 8:26-29

Philip's example in this passage serves as an encouragement and an indictment for us all. God called and Philip listened. God told Philip to go and he went. God told Philip to insert himself in a situation and he did. Philip heard from God and he obeyed without question, and with the Holy Spirit's guidance and help, so can we. But how often do we listen, go, and obey? Not as often as we should.

Later in life, when there are more memories behind us than days ahead, the things that will matter to us won't be the economic, political, or academic gains. What will matter is how quickly and faithfully we obeyed God's call. Wherever you are today, give God your "yes." And give it to Him now. A yes to God today will take you places you never imagined you would serve. "Yes" does have its uncertainties but never its regrets. On the other side of saying yes to God are the miraculous moments only faithful, obedient people get to enjoy.



Where is God calling you to go, and what is God calling you to do today?

Day 4: Read Acts 8:30-35

Imagine Philip's surprise at finding a seemingly random stranger on a desert road reading from a scroll of Isaiah about a prophecy of the coming Messiah. Yet God orchestrated this meeting and its particulars. God has given His Word to this world, and He sends it out to be effective in cutting through to the hearts of sinners. But God often works through His people to accomplish this gospel work.

Thank God for the preacher and teacher who faithfully explains the Word of God to us. Times without number a weary and confused soul has "stumbled" into a conversation with an alert, informed Christ-follower. By the time that conversation ended, that person left clear on the ways of God. May we be that kind of well-positioned person, the kind who helps others see Jesus clearly through the Scriptures. Yet none of us can be this kind of person and do this important gospel work apart from the unique power of the Holy Spirit. He is the real teacher who uses others to explain the Scriptures.



What role do the Scriptures play in your efforts to share the gospel with others?

Day 5: Read Acts 8:36-40

Once you discover God's gracious gift of Jesus, the only appropriate response is to commit every compartment of your life to Him. It's all about Him and He wants all of you. In what ways might God be calling you to commit your life to Him more fully? Nothing prevents you from committing yourself to Jesus.

The Ethiopian eunuch believed and asked to be baptized. And after he was baptized, he went on his way rejoicing.

Philip committed himself to obeying God's call. And after he shared the gospel and affirmed a new believer in Christ, he again went where the Spirit led him, preaching the gospel all the way.

God the Father, through His Holy Spirit, calls people to believe in His Son Jesus and to obey Him with their lives. God graciously saves sinners. Commit yourself to Him now!



What commitment will you make to following Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit?

UNIT 28

SESSION 1

1. J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020) [eBook].
2. Martin Luther, quoted in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, eds. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingle, and Lubomír Batka (OUP Oxford, 2014) [eBook].
3. St. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 97.

SESSION 2

1. A. W. Tozer, *How to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit, in Life in the Spirit* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 24.
2. Andrew Murray, in *Andrew Murray On Prayer* (Whitaker House, 1998) [eBook].

CHRISTMAS SESSION

1. See Keiki Hendrix, "Christmas Classics: 'The Man and the Birds' by Paul Harvey," *Everyday Christian*, December 17, 2010, www.everydaychristian.com/blogs/post/christmas_classics_the_man_and_the_birds_by_paul_harvey]
2. Samuel Ngewa, "John," in *Africa Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1279.
3. C. S. Lewis, "The Incarnation," in *The Joyful Christian* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 52.

SESSION 3

1. R. C. Sproul, *Surprised by Suffering* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), 40.
2. Jen Wilkin, *None Like Him* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016) [eBook].
3. Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, in *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005) [Wordsearch].

SESSION 4

1. Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 111.
2. David Platt, "Is Your Definition of Faith Biblical?" *Radical*, July 27, 2018, radical.net/is-your-definition-of-faith-biblical.
3. Leo the Great, Sermons 21.3, quoted in *James, 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude*, ed. Gerald Bray, vol. XI in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].

UNIT 29

SESSION 1

1. Randy Alcorn, *Managing God's Money* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2011), 4.
2. St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. John Behr (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 79.
3. Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010), 91.

SESSION 2

1. Athanasius, *De Synodis*, in *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, vol. IV in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1892), 453.
2. Eric Mason, *Unleashed* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2015), 61.

SESSION 3

1. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 7, quoted in *Romans*, ed. Gerald Bray, vol. VI in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].
2. Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 568.
3. John Newton, "Amazing Grace! How Sweet the Sound," in *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Worship, 2008), 104.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Christianity Today*, "John Newton: Reformed Slave Trader," May 12, 2020, www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/pastorsandpreachers/john-newton.html.

SESSION 4

1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Touchstone, 1955), 56.
2. "James 2," in Bible Lessons International, 2012, bible.org/book/export/html/21430.
3. Adrian Rogers, *Adrianisms: The Wit and Wisdom of Adrian Rogers* (Memphis, TN: Love Worth Finding Ministries, 2006), 57.
4. "Significant Statistics About Tithing and Church Generosity," CDF Capital, February 25, 2019, www.cdfcapital.org/tithing-generosity.

UNIT 30

SESSION 1

1. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981), 66.
2. Francis A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, in *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 350.
3. Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles* 18, quoted in *Acts*, ed. Francis Martin, vol. V in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].

SESSION 2

1. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67, quoted in *The Early Christians in Their Own Words*, edited by Eberhard Arnold (Rifton, NY: Plough Publishing, 2011), 83.
2. Rudolf Gwalther, Homily 65, Acts 9:10-16, quoted in *Acts*, eds. Esther Chung-Kim and Todd R. Hains, vol. 6 in *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014) [Wordsearch].
3. Billy Graham, in *Billy Graham in Quotes*, eds. Franklin Graham with Donna Lee Toney (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011) [eBook].

SESSION 3

1. Edward Mote, "The Solid Rock," in *Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Worship, 2008), 511.
2. Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Complete* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 1981) [Wordsearch].
3. Heinrich Bullinger, *Commentary on Colossians* 1:23, quoted in *Philippians, Colossians*, ed. Graham Tomlin, vol. 11 in *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014) [Wordsearch].

SESSION 4

1. Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures 4.1, quoted in *1–2 Corinthians*, ed. Gerald Bray, vol. VII in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001) [Wordsearch].
2. Joni Eareckson Tada, "Share His Sufferings," in *Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross*, ed. Nancy Guthrie (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 143.
3. David S. Dockery, *The Doctrine of the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Seminary Extension of the Southern Baptist Seminaries, 1997), 36.