

Acts 8:26–40

Ps. 22:25–31

1 John 4:7–21

John 15:1–8

Philip the Evangelist

Goal for the Session *Children will discover, through the story of Philip and the Ethiopian official, that everyone is included in God’s plan.*

■ P R E P A R I N G F O R T H E S E S S I O N

Focus on Acts 8:26–40

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Paul W. Walaskay

Luke tells us a great deal about these two men. Philip is one of seven Greek-speaking Jewish Christians appointed to tend to the needs of others (Acts 6:1–6). The Ethiopian is in charge of the treasury of the Candace, the official title of the queen mother, head of the government in Ethiopia. That he travels by chariot attests to his status. That he possesses a scroll of the prophet Isaiah attests to his wealth. Moreover, we are told that he is a eunuch, a not unusual situation for one whose life is devoted to serving in the queen’s court. As a castrated male, he would not have been granted access to the temple (see Deuteronomy 23:1).

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Karen Baker-Fletcher

Notice the text’s description of how the Spirit of God moves Philip to act and teach. When the messenger of God says to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza” (v. 26), Philip immediately gets up and goes. Upon seeing the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip *runs* to the chariot where the eunuch, in charge of the queen’s treasury, is sitting. He immediately asks the eunuch if he understands the passage from Isaiah (53:7–8) that the eunuch is reading aloud.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Thomas G. Long

As the gospel moves into the world, it gathers under the wings of God’s mercy more and more of those who have been lost, pushed away, and forgotten. “What is to prevent me from being baptized?” asked the eunuch. “Absolutely nothing,” whispered the Spirit. So the eunuch commanded the chariot to stop, and he was baptized right on the spot. Walls of prejudice and prohibition that had stood for generations came tumbling down by the breath of God’s Holy Spirit, and another man who felt lost and humiliated was found and restored in the wideness of God’s grace in Jesus Christ.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Barbara Brown Taylor

It is Philip’s grounding in his tradition that enables him to recognize God’s leading—even when it leads him places no human authority has told him he may go—and to act in the power of the Spirit. If we were to surrender control of our own travel plans for even an hour, where might the Spirit send us? How many of our accidental encounters with other people are really divine appointments? How can we learn to tell the difference between the two?

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Acts 8:26–40

Focus on Your Teaching

Children today are aware of barriers or walls that exclude some people, even if they have not experienced exclusion themselves. Several activities in this session help them imagine how it feels to be excluded and encourage them to consider how they might respond to those who feel the pain of exclusion. In short, the clear message is that God welcomes everyone, from the Ethiopian official to the new child of an immigrant family in their community. Seek community examples to personalize this session for the children.

Welcoming God, I pray that I may be equally welcoming to each child, showing each one your inclusive love. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- Christ candle, matches or paper flames
- white cloth
- offering basket
- Bible
- gold ribbons, 6" to 8" long, one per child
- prepared scroll props (see Gathering)
- Singing the Feast*, vol. 1; CD player
- Color Pack 1, 19, 20

For Responding

- option 1: 8 ½" x 14" paper, markers or crayons, pencils, 6" lengths of ribbon or twine
- option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 2 on card stock, unsharpened new pencils with erasers, pushpins, scissors, markers, newsprint
- option 4: *Singing the Feast*, vol. 1; CD player

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

In advance, roll up sheets of copier paper and tie them with ribbon or twine to make a “scroll” for each pair of children.

As you greet the children, welcome each one. Ask about their week or what helped them remember that Jesus was their good shepherd during the week. When you are ready to begin, have the group arrange the white cloth on the worship table. Place an offering basket, the Christ candle, and the Bible on it. Then give each child a gold ribbon to place on the table. Have the children sit down. Receive the offering. Point out the white cloth on the table, signifying the season of the Great Fifty Days of Easter. The color is white or gold. Ask a child to find Easter 5, which is today, on Color Pack 1.

Light the Christ candle, saying, “Jesus Christ is the light of the world.”

Pray:

Loving God, thank you for being with us as we come together to learn about you and Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lead the group in the Easter greeting, or invite a child to say the opening line:

Leader: Christ is risen.

Group: Christ is risen indeed.

Sing “Hallelujah! Praise Ye the Lord!” (track 23 on *Singing the Feast*, vol. 1).

Extinguish the candle.

Nothing helps children understand how it feels to be excluded more than a small taste of it as an experiment. Ask the group to imagine that you must decide who is eligible for special

Hallelujah! Praise Ye the Lord!

Hallelu, hallelu, hallelujah!
Praise ye the Lord!
Hallelu, hallelu, hallelujah!
Praise ye the Lord!
Praise ye the Lord!
Hallelujah!
Praise ye the Lord!
Hallelujah!
Praise ye the Lord!
Hallelujah!
Praise ye the Lord!

recognition for knowing Bible stories. You have chosen to make that decision based on the color of the clothing they are wearing. For example, anyone who is wearing the color orange on something visible may be selected. Ask:

- ✧ If you are not wearing something orange, how do you feel about my decision?
- ✧ If you are wearing something orange, how do you feel?

Explain that the people who are not wearing orange have been excluded from being recognized simply because they are not wearing the right color. However, they did not know this when they were getting dressed this morning. Perhaps some don't have any orange clothing. Once they were here they couldn't change. Ask:

- ✧ How are people excluded or left out today based on something they cannot change?

Invite the children to listen for someone who was excluded in the Bible story.

EXPLORING

Ask a child to get the Bible from the worship table and turn to Acts. Remind the group that Acts or Acts of the Apostles follows the four Gospels in the New Testament. Ask:

- ✧ Who are the stories about in Acts?

Have a child turn to chapter 8. Explain that some of Jesus' followers traveled away from Jerusalem to tell people about Jesus and God. One of these followers was Philip. Leaving the Bible open to Acts 8, tell the story from Resource Sheet 1 (On the Road). Have Color Pack 19 and 20 ready to show at the appropriate times in the story. After the story, ask:

- ✧ Which man in the story had been excluded?

If children ask about eunuchs, explain that the man had surgery when he was young that made it impossible for him to have children.

Ask:

- ✧ What happened to the Ethiopian official that included him in the church?

Form pairs with one child as Philip and the other child, the Ethiopian official. Give the Ethiopian officials prepared "scrolls." Tell the story again as the children act it out, repeating their lines after you. After this dramatization, ask:

- ✧ Why do you think Philip did what the angel and the Spirit told him?
- ✧ What do you think the Ethiopian official will do when he gets back to Ethiopia?
- ✧ How might you help others feel included in the church today?

RESPONDING

Offer at least two options so children have a choice. One might be more challenging to interest older children who can work on their own.

1. **Scrolls** The scroll the Ethiopian official was reading played an important part in the story. Have the children make scrolls as reminders of Philip's work to tell others the good news of Jesus Christ, which is for all people. Each child will need a sheet of

See the "What?" excerpt on p. 1 for more information about eunuchs.

Older children may wish to draw the story in cartoon format on the scroll.

I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me

1. I'm gonna **live* so God can use me anywhere, Lord, anytime!
I'm gonna **live* so God can use me anywhere, Lord, anytime!
2. ** work*
3. ** share*
4. ** care*

EASY
PREP

8 ½" x 14" paper, pencils or pens, crayons, and a 6-inch piece of ribbon or twine. Have the children draw a scene from the story on the scroll. If some wish, provide Bibles so they may add the portion of Isaiah in Acts 8:32b–33. When their scrolls are finished, have the children roll them up and tie them with the ribbon or twine.

2. **Spirit Pinwheels** Throughout the book of Acts, God's Spirit plays an important role. This is also true in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian official. The word *spirit* can also be translated "wind" or "breath." Have the children make pinwheels as a reminder of the role of the Spirit in this story of the early church. Before they make the pinwheels, brainstorm words related to the Holy Spirit. List them on newsprint. Give the children copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Spirit Pinwheels) on card stock. Use the directions and pattern on the resource sheet to make the pinwheels. Encourage the children to help each other adjust their pinwheels so they move easily.

3. **Welcoming All** Role plays are an effective way for children to practice welcoming others to their church and group. Select one or more of the following scenarios for the children to use or create your own:

- ✿ A mother and child are standing in the doorway to your meeting space. They look uncomfortable and seem hesitant to enter. What do you do?
- ✿ A young woman is standing outside the church as your family arrives. She looks uncertain about going into the building. What do you do?
- ✿ When you get to church school, your teacher and a new boy are there. The teacher says, "This is Safir. He and his family have just come to our town. He speaks little English. Please help him feel at home with us." What do you do?

After their role plays, talk about ways to welcome and include others in your church.

4. **Song** If Philip had a theme song, it might be "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me" (track 6 on *Singing the Feast*, vol. 1). Sing it together. Ask:

- ✿ How did Philip live the words of this song?
- ✿ How might you live the words of this song?

CLOSING

Gather at the worship table. Light the Christ candle.

Sing "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me" together. Invite the children to name or think of ways they will live so God can use them in the coming week.

As the children leave, say to each one: "(Name), look for ways to include others this week. God's Spirit is with you."

Suggest that they call or e-mail someone from the group who has been absent and invite that person to come next week.

On the Road

Based on Acts 8:26-40

Philip had been chosen by the apostles to be a deacon and serve others. This happened when there was some difficulty about everyone getting enough food. He was chosen because he was faithful and fair.

On this day, Philip had a most extraordinary experience. An angel from God said to him, "At noon, take off on the road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza, through the desert." Philip did so immediately.

At the same time, an Ethiopian official started on the same road to go back to Ethiopia. This man was the treasurer for Candace, the Ethiopian queen. He had come to Jerusalem to worship, even though he was a eunuch and could not enter the temple. As he rode in his carriage, he read a scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

The Spirit of God said to Philip, "Go to the carriage and stay alongside it."

Philip ran to the carriage and heard the Ethiopian official reading from Isaiah. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

"How can I?" the man replied. "I have no one to teach me. Come into the carriage and sit with me." (*Show Color Pack 19.*)

The Ethiopian official read:

*Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
 and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
 so he does not open his mouth.*

The official asked, "Who is this about?"

Then Philip told him the good news of Jesus Christ. Soon they came to some water.

"Look! Water! Why can't I be baptized here?" He ordered the driver to stop. Philip and the Ethiopian official walked to the water. Philip baptized the official. (*Show Color Pack 20.*)

When they left the water, the Spirit whisked Philip away to Azotus. He went all over that area, telling people the good news of Jesus Christ. The Ethiopian official never saw Philip again.



Spirit Pinwheels



Directions: Cut out the square. Use markers to write words about the Spirit beside the stars. Turn the square over and draw swirling lines. Starting at each corner, cut carefully almost to the center. Gently curve each corner with a dot to the center of the square. Poke a pushpin through all four corners and the center. Push the point of the pushpin into the side of a pencil's eraser. Adjust as needed so that the pinwheel spins when you blow on it.

