




THE COMMUNITY

Opportunities Abound | DIVINE APPOINTMENTS

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Acts 8:26-40

Philip is an apostle who is introduced to the book of Acts earlier in this chapter. He is the second of the three great P's in Acts. The first seven chapters have largely concerned the church in and around Jerusalem, led by Peter. But, in the opening verses of chapter 8, a great persecution breaks out in Jerusalem and the church is scattered. God, however, uses this persecution to spread the gospel wherever the believers have fled. Philip is one who takes the gospel outside Jerusalem fulfilling, Jesus' call to expand beyond Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. The rest of the book of Acts records that expansion under the leadership of Paul, Peter, Philip and Paul. Not very alliterative actually, but all P's nonetheless.

In verse 27, Philip leaves Jerusalem for a Philistine city 50 miles to the south. He goes in response to a command from an angel. Along the way, he meets an Ethiopian official who is reading a passage from the prophet Isaiah. Recognizing the opportunity, Philip initiates with him and offers to explain the passage. The official eagerly accepts, and Philip leads him to faith in Christ.

Philip had the thrill of experiencing a divine appointment. It was the Spirit's idea for him to walk down that road. It was the Spirit who coordinated the Ethiopian's travels to coincide with Philip's. It was the Spirit who prompted the official to read Isaiah 53 at precisely the right time. All Philip had to do was show up.

God does this all the time. According to Ephesians 2:10, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Those "good works" are divine appointments – opportunities He has set up for you. There are doorways all across campus that we merely need to walk through in obedience. As we do, we can have the thrill of being used by God. We need to learn to see these opportunities, and be obedient when they arise.

There could hardly have been a more opportune passage for the Ethiopian to be reading. It was from Isaiah 53, which is one of the clearest Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. Look at it in context. From Isaiah 52:13 through the end of chapter 53, Isaiah describes in vivid detail a man who is a servant of God, but is despised and rejected, and who is killed for the sins of others. His death produces life for us. After His death, He sees life and is given a great reward. This is probably the single clearest picture of the Messiah's suffering in the Old Testament.

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What's the Big Idea?

Ephesians 2:10 says, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." There are divine opportunities all around us. God has set up appointments for us to walk into, if we just have the eyes to see and the will to obey.

What's the Problem?

If we are not looking for and open to the opportunities God gives us everyday to be His ambassadors we miss out on the opportunity to love and serve people for Christ.

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As the Ethiopian reads this, he wonders who the man in the passage is. Philip is able to show him that it is Jesus, the Messiah. Isaiah was written more than 600 years before Jesus was born and describes perfectly how our redemption was accomplished. It would be exciting to walk through this passage with your group and observe how accurately it describes Jesus.

In Acts 8:38, Philip baptizes the official who goes away rejoicing at his new life in Christ. What a privilege we have to be used by God. Isn't it plain from this text that the God who oversaw all the details of this encounter, could have finished it all by Himself? But, He didn't! In His grace, He invited Philip to participate and lead this man to faith in Christ.

In the same way He invites us to participate in the most thrilling, exciting adventure the human spirit can ever know. He calls us to be His ambassadors to take the gospel of hope to a lost and dying world. He ordains the circumstances, works in people's lives, and lets us communicate the gospel to ready hearts. What great fun to be a messenger of the gospel! Keep your eyes open for opportunities he has prepared, and walk obediently into them.

What's Our Response?

Encourage your group to look for divine appointments this week. Train yourselves to believe that God is setting up such appointments around you. You'll be amazed at what you see. Walk by faith into those situations, trusting God to use you.

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What Are the Questions?

Acts 8:26-40

Launch

Have you ever been benched on a sports team? What was it like? How did it feel if and when the coach finally put you in the game?

Explore

Read Acts 8:26-40.

1. A new character is introduced in Acts 8: Philip. Who is he?
2. up until this point, the main character has been Peter. What happened to change this?
3. In verse 27, Philip leaves Jerusalem heading south for a Philistine city. Whose idea was this?
4. Philip's eyes were open, looking for an opportunity to share Christ. When he hears the official reading Isaiah, he recognizes the divine appointment. Would you have? What would you say?
5. What can you do to find opportunities like this, and be ready for them?
6. The Ethiopian is reading Isaiah 53 and wonders about whom the author is talking. Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12. What in this description corresponds to what you know about Jesus?
7. If all you had to draw from was Isaiah 53 how would you communicate the gospel message to someone?
8. In verse 38, the official believes the gospel, is baptized, and goes away rejoicing. What did God do to bring this about? What did Philip do?
9. Did God need Philip's help? Why did He use him?
10. Some have seen in vv. 39 and 40 evidence of some sweet Holy Spirit teleportation power. Others with blander imaginations think it just means the Spirit led him from this place to that. What do you think is going on?

Apply

11. Do you think God still directs our steps like this? How would you know if He was?
12. When was a time you felt particularly led by God to share your faith? What were the circumstances?
13. Why do you think God doesn't lead this way all of the time?
14. Have you gotten the impression from this series in Acts that sharing the gospel ought to be central in the lives of believers? How is our ministry doing in this regard? How are you doing?

NOTES:

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What Are the Answers?

1. Philip is one of the apostles. He was introduced earlier in the chapter bringing the gospel to Samaria.
2. A great persecution struck in Chapter 8, and the church was scattered. The focus in Acts shifts from Jerusalem where Peter led the church, to the geographic spread of the gospel led by others. Philip is the leader we are watching here. Soon it will be Paul.
3. It was God's idea. See 8:26.
4. Allow the group to discuss.
5. Discuss the topic. Go where people are. Initiate conversations. Be friendly. Know the gospel. Memorize a clear way to communicate it. Pray for opportunities, and look, with eyes of faith, to see how God provides them.
6. The passage is a prophecy about the Messiah's crucifixion.
7. Give the group time to formulate their presentation of the gospel.
8. God called Philip on that journey, coordinated the timing to match perfectly with the Ethiopian's journey, and caused the official to read a perfect passage at just the right time.
9. No, God didn't need Philip's help. But, He graciously allows us to be involved in His great work.
10. Who knows? Teleportation would be pretty cool though.
- 11.-12. Allow the group to discuss.
13. The answer is clearly speculative. One answer is that He probably does more than we realize, but we just aren't that open to sharing our faith.
- 14.-15. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:10



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