

Agents of Hope: God's Great Missionaries

Gifted for Service: Philip

Lesson #12 for September 20, 2008

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This lesson is about a story of a man that was gifted and used by God. This story is found in Acts 6-8, but it is good for us to understand where the church was at this time and place. Acts 1-5 tells us how the apostles received the HS, how the church grew quickly, the persecution of the church (particularly Peter and John), the harmonious church (Acts 2: 42-47, Acts 4:32, 34), the diversity of the church, and then the disagreements in the church. (Acts 6: 1-6)

Read Acts 2: 42-47 Acts 4:32,34

Happy church, loving, caring, giving to one another.

Despite former prejudices, all were in harmony with one another.

Church made up of many—Jews, Greeks, Hebrews

They met together every day, were respected by each other, they shared all they had. Do you think they believed that Jesus would be coming back at almost any time? Were their experiences thought to be an extension of the “discipleship training program” that Jesus had established earlier? Was this a result of the outpouring of the “early rain”? Will the same thing happen again in the “latter rain”?

The church thrived until Acts 6: 1-6

“Satan knew that so long as this union continued to exist, he would be powerless to check the progress of gospel truth; and he sought to take advantage of former habits of thought, in the hope that thereby he might be able to introduce into the church elements of disunion.” AA 88

“Thus it came to pass that as disciples were multiplied, the enemy succeeded in arousing the suspicions of some who had formerly been in the habit of looking with jealousy on their brethren in the faith and finding fault with their spiritual leaders, and so “there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews.” AA 88.

This is where Philip comes in.

What does it mean to be a deacon? What does it mean to be filled by the HS? People chosen to be church leaders and to resolve differences between groups must be led by the Spirit of God and also be wise in their methods of dealing with controversy.

This is one of the church designated leadership positions. It is a position of servanthood. We like to be called friends of Jesus rather than servants. Jesus shows us how to be “servants” to one another while he was on earth. What does that mean? Being a servant is being like God—it is part of His character. Think of Joseph. He was in charge of Potipher’s household.

After the stoning of Stephen and the beginning of a major persecution of Christians in the Jerusalem area, Philip fled to the principle city of Samaria.
Acts 8:5

“Philip fled” - is it possible he was fleeing the wrath of the Jewish leaders, had he stayed and preached? By working in Samaria, did Philip remove himself completely from the possibility of persecution? How far was it from Jerusalem to Samaria? (About 40 miles/60 kms)

Samaria: diverse city. Had been “introduced” to Jesus message through the Samaritan woman at the well, who ran back to tell everyone what Jesus had said to her.

Samaritans “paid close attention” to Philip’s miracles. “attended to” as opposed to being “amazed” or “dazzled” or “astonished” by Simon’s sorcery. Q: Did Philip work this way (with miracles) because he knew of the longstanding “acts” of Simon?

Cross cultural evangelism: have to find “common ground”. In this case, it was the 1st 5 books of the OT that Philip had in common with them. Not to mention, the thirst for the sensational (miracles).

Q: What were Philips methods used in his sharing this Good News to this diverse culture?

Q: What are methods we can employ? Imagine standing on a street corner in NYC and asking people if they were willing to stop and talk about God? Now put yourself on a corner in Chattanooga

Get to know people FIRST before you do anything else!

Now imagine you’re in a hospital room: would the person’s illness dictate their receptiveness to your question? Accelerated “friendship” - sympathy, empathy.

Q: How do we say things without turning people off?

A: I think that’s why I’d rather not SAY much at all. Let my actions speak initially, and take effect. If THEN I sense a receptiveness...

(Did God allow persecution of the church members in Jerusalem specifically so that they would leave Jerusalem and thereby spread the gospel to other areas? Could that happen to us in our day:? Why do you think they had not begun to spread out before the persecution? Do we need persecution in order to leave the Adventist “ghettos: and spread the “larger View” to the rest of the world? Do we need to leave “Jerusalem” and go to “Judea”?)

Have you ever thought about what would you do if the persecution of Christians started in your city or area? Would you leave everything behind and go to a new

area, new culture, new cultural ideals to tell others about Jesus.....?

Stephen actually got a lot of attention because he healed the sick and cast out demons. Why don't we have that power today? Or do we have the power?

*Ethiopian eunuch: familiar with writings of OT. Isaiah's writings. "Go run alongside the carriage." What did Philip say? I've got the answers?? NO! Jesus doesn't do that. **"Do you understand what you're reading?"***

Q: Why is that so winsome?

A: Asking a question is offering an invitation to respond, not forcing himself on another. Question respects the person, their right to want to hear or not.

Respects the "understanding" of the person. BRILLIANT QUESTION!

Q: How can I get this person to ask ME about my understanding?

"If God were the way you depicted Him to be, I can understand why you don't believe. What if He were like this....?"

Where did Philip begin? Is this story telling us a formula that we must begin with the writings of Isaiah 53?? Not likely. Philip started with the writings of Isaiah, presumably because that's where the Ethiopian eunuch was!

Q: Should Philip have required the Ethiopian eunuch to wait a few months to make sure he was making a sincere and honest decision and to go through additional lessons before he could be baptized? Should Paul have made the Philippian jailer and his family wait before being baptized? (Acts 16:33)

Q: Should we allow a person to be baptized the same day s/he makes a decision to follow God? Should new "converts" be integrated into the church and treated the same as "more mature" members? Or should all new "converts" take an intense and systematic book-by-book study of the Bible immediately upon "conversion"? Should all of us take part in intense and systematic study of the Bible?

Wednesday

Spiritual Gifts – We know that the HS gifts people with various kinds of capacities and abilities so they may spread the gospel more effectively. Read Roman 12:6-8 and 1Cor 12:1-11, 27-31 and Compare with Acts 8:4-8.

Did Philip have more than one gift? Do you have a gift or more than one gift?

Do you need more than one gift to be effective for him?

Do spiritual gifts always have an underlying use of service (Quarterly says so)

What about the gifts of the Spirit? Gal 5:22 Are these different than spiritual gifts?

Love, joy, peace patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, humility, self-control

Thursday

What is the purpose of the story of Philip and Simon Magus? Acts 8:9-25

After all Simon believed and was baptized.

What happened?

Are there people in your church that believe foolish things?

How do you respond/treat new believers or people in the church who have “different thoughts” about God, Jesus, HS.

How do you treat people that don't believe in the “larger view”?

Are the “larger view” people better than other Christians?

Have we won the theological battle?

We must preach, teach, talk humbly about our Christianity. All of us are growing in the knowledge and wisdom of God and in our relationship with Jesus. We all being led by the HS in ways that are relevant to us individually. Allow for differences and be open to other ideas like you want your hearers to be open.....