

Youth Teaching Resources

April 28, 2024



Season of Easter

April 7, 2024—“True Community”—Acts 4:32-35

April 14, 2024—“Why the Surprise?”—Acts 3 (RCL 3:12-19)

April 21, 2024—“This Is the Way”—Acts 4:1-12 (RCL 4:5-12)

April 28, 2024—“What Hinders Me?”—Acts 8:26-40

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What Hinders Me?

Acts 8:26-40

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Tyler Johnson

This youth teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Gathering

As your group comes together, ask students how they are doing, what their week looks like, and reflect on the previous week's challenge.

Opening Activity

Ask students if they have ever tried to extend their Birthday past the actual day. Some people call it their "Birthday week" or "Birthday month" where they try and celebrate their birth all week or all month instead of just on the day. While there is probably a lot of excitement on the day of your birth, it may be hard for others to keep up that same enthusiasm all month long. Why do you think that is? Or you go to Youth Camp over the summer and you have this great time and connection with God that you try and bring back to church on a weekly basis, but it is hard to keep up. Why is that?

Why fade in excitement?

Listening to the Scripture

Read aloud Acts 8: 26-40.

- This passage is really attuned to the idea of listening to God's call, especially here in the case of Phillip, where he was reliant on God's call not only on his life to preach the Gospel, but for directions about what to do next in your life. When you think of God's call on your life, do you think about your literal next steps, or something way off in the future? Or maybe something in between those two extremes?
- Verses 30-40 highlights one who has a hard time reading God's word, and is relying on Phillip to interpret meaning. Why is it so important to read scripture together in community rather than solely on your own?
- After listening to God's call, reading God's word, the next step was to live what you heard and saw. Do you think this is the formula for the early church to keep the excitement and drive going to spread the Gospel? Does the same method work for us today?

If you would like to continue the discussion, consider *Digging Deeper*.

What do you think this passage teaches us about acceptance of others?

Listening to the Scripture *continued*

If the group is up for a challenge, discuss what Tony poses as *The Hardest Question*: What hinders us?

What Causes us to lose our drive to seek, read, and live God's word in our lives today? What are those things that keep us from what God is calling us to be?

Application

Before closing, introduce this week's challenge.

Identify a few things that keep you from living your call as a Christian and how you can live more fully into who God is calling you to be this week.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Ethiopia and its queen—In the Hebrew Bible, the area here called Ethiopia was usually called “*Cush*.” The Egyptians spelled it “*Kush*,” and the early Greek translation rendered it *Aithiopia*. The area referred to was between the first and sixth cataracts of the Nile, comprising part of what is now southern Egypt and the Sudan. Modern Ethiopia is further to the south. The entire area south of Egypt was also known as “Nubia.”

Though most translations speak of “Candace, queen of Ethiopia,” the word “Candace,” like “Pharaoh,” may have been a title rather than a personal name.

Acceptance—Although the Ethiopian official worshiped the God of the Jews, he could not have become a Jew. First century Hebrews had rituals designed to incorporate proselytes from among the Gentiles, but Deut. 23:1 ruled that “No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD” (NRSV).

It was common in the ancient world for male officials who served in high places to be castrated as a sign of their loyalty, and as added assurance that the women of the court would be safe around them. That job requirement was rejected by the Jews, and would hardly hold up in today’s world, but was an accepted part of life in antiquity.

Requirements for baptism?—The transmission of this text has an history. In the oldest and best manuscripts of the New Testament that we have from long before the text was divided into chapters or verses—Philip offers no response to the man’s question: “What is there to prevent me from being baptized?” (v. 36). The account goes immediately what became v. 38, where Philip ordered the chariot to stop by a pool of water, and baptized him.

Thus, the implicit answer to the man’s question is “nothing.” Nothing prevented him from being baptized, and Philip felt no need to comment.

As time passed, however, there must have been some in the church who were not comfortable with this unanswered question, or with its implication. So, in later Greek manuscripts representative of what we now call the “Western tradition”—the one used most prominently in the King James Version of the Bible, the text was expanded. What we now have as v. 37 echoes an early credo that may have been part of a first century baptismal formula: “*And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*” (v. 37, KJV). The NRSV, NET2, NIV11, ESV, and NASB20 all omit the verse in the text, relegating it to a footnote.

If there were people who still dared add to the received text of the Bible today, they might expand Philip’s answer even more. They might insist that the eunuch visualize all his sins and speak particular words of repentance, or that he must first have a greater understanding

Digging Deeper *continued*

of doctrine, or that he must “walk the aisle” and make a public profession of faith in an established church before he could be baptized.

We can be glad that God’s grace is bigger than that: glad that God takes us where we are, loves us where we are, and saves us where we are when we trust divine grace. When the eunuch understood what Christ had done for him and wanted to do for him, there was still much he did not understand, but he understood enough to seek Christ’s presence. For Philip, that was enough to warrant an immediate baptism.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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What hinders us?

The hardest question related to this story does not derive from the text itself, but from our refusal to learn from it. How many of us can claim to be without prejudice when it comes to welcoming others into our churches?

In America, Sunday morning remains the most racially divided time of the week. I have known both youth ministers and pastors who have been forced from their positions because they encouraged Black friends to participate in the church programs.

Such behavior does more than hurt the minority youth or children whose faith could be damaged by such attitudes. It can also disillusion or derail ministers from their calling, it prevents the prejudiced from experiencing the fullness of Christ, and it harms the witness of the church.

In many congregations, similar exclusions apply to persons who are gay, lesbian, or transgendered—not entirely unlike the eunuch, whose gender had been surgically altered and whose appearance would have distinguished him from other males.

The text demands that we ask ourselves if we are willing to reach out to anyone, of any ethnicity or gender expression, without regard for whether we think they deserve it or whether their presence makes us uncomfortable in some way.

Are we willing to share the good news of grace that knows no limits?

We claim to serve a God who seeks people who love God supremely and who love each other as Christ loves them. For us to be faithful followers, that must also be our passion.

Such living is not a duty to be met, but an outgrowth of who we are as sinners saved by grace, willing to use our gifts for the glory of God and the good of humankind. We are called to live and speak in such a way that when others read the pages of our lives, they will understand what God's greatness and graciousness are all about.