

“Witnessing 101”  
Acts 8:26-40  
Series: Book of Acts, #09  
Pastor Lyle L. Wahl  
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## Introduction

*Witnessing*. How do you feel when you hear that word? How do you feel when someone talks to you about *witnessing*? Many Christians feel uneasy, tense and even guilty. For others, it strikes a responsive, even joyful chord. The story is told of a little boy who went to Sunday School for the first time and had an older lady as his teacher. When he returned home his mother asked, “Who was your teacher?” The little boy answered, “I don’t remember her name, but she must have been Jesus’ grandmother because she didn’t talk about anyone else.” She was a *clear, joyful witness* of Jesus.

Studies show us, and have consistently for decades, that only one out of ten Christians in North America has *ever* led another person to accept Jesus Christ as Savior.

This morning, in our trek through Acts, we are in the last part of chapter 8. This passage continues the account of Philip. He was one of the seven chosen to administer serving food to needy widows in the Jerusalem church. Last week we saw him move north into Samaria when he had to leave Jerusalem because of persecution. Now God tells him to move on to the south and west of Jerusalem.

This account gives us an excellent example of how to witness. It is not steeped in detailed philosophy and methodology. It gives us an introduction to witnessing. And so today we are taking a mini-course, “*Witnessing 101*.” We will walk through five key principles on how to witness effectively for Jesus Christ.

### **Actively obey God.** (26, 27, 29, 40)

The first practical principle is to actively obey God. Let’s review what we know of Philip up to this point. 6:3 tells us he was “full of the Spirit and of wisdom.” He and his six fellow workers were also faithful in a variety of other ministries.

When he was forced from Jerusalem he went north to Samaria, where he had a dramatically effective ministry. Many people were delivered from demons and many others healed. Great numbers came to faith in Christ. The church now began to expand to non-Jewish people.

Then we come to the beginning of this section, 8:26, “*But* an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, ‘Get up and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ (This is a desert road.)” We don’t have any more specifics. Philip once again had to leave a successful and growing ministry, and this time to head out into the desert.

His response? Verse 27, “So he got up and went...” *What a response!* “So he got up and went...” Now, that’s *Active Obedience*. He didn’t know why, he didn’t know exactly where, he didn’t know how long he would be there or what this was about. But, *he got up and went*.

On the desert road he saw a caravan with an important official returning to Ethiopia from Jerusalem. This is not the Ethiopia of today, but was south of ancient Egypt. Today it would be in southern Egypt and Sudan. The Ethiopia we know is on the southeast side of Sudan.

Notice what happens next, 29-30,

“Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go up and join this chariot.’ Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’”

Again, *Active Obedience*.

Philip answered his questions and explained the Scriptures. The official believed and was baptized.

Then what? Drop down to verse 39,

“When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus [north of Gaza], and as he passed through he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea.” (39-40)

Philip was a man of active obedience. The question for us is, do we actively obeyed God as he did? Christ’s command is clear:

- “you shall be My witnesses” (Acts 1:8).
- “make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19).

Like Moses, you may feel shy, unable to speak eloquently. But, as God told Moses, He made your, He made your mouth, and He will give you the wisdom and words, He will give you the strength to obey Him.

Then, always remember that “the *gospel* [not our words] is the power of salvation to *everyone* who believes” (Romans 1:16). We *are* Christ’s witnesses. We are live and speak of Him.

This is principle #1. The second key, practical principle in “*Witnessing 101*” is to look for opportunities.

**Look for opportunities.** (27-30)

Philip always looked for opportunities to witness. He was on the road toward Gaza. He saw a chariot, probably just one of many on the that well-travelled road. The Holy Spirit

“said to him,” “Go up and join this chariot.” God did not give him any other directions at this point. So, verse 30 says, he ran up to the chariot. When he got there what did he do? He did not immediately get out his copy of *The Four Spiritual Laws* and go through it. He observed, he paid attention, he *listened*. Then he began with a natural question. He was *looking for an opportunity*.

So the question for us is do we look for opportunities to witness? Observing and listening are important and can, at times, be more difficult than saying something. Opportunities come in different shapes and sizes.

- Sometimes we have one-time opportunities to plant the seed of the gospel, or even lead a person to Christ. There are more of these than we might think as we are out in the community, in shopping malls, traveling and even in the workplace.
- Then there are the people we know who do not yet know Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Opportunities are not in short supply. Our challenge begins with recognizing them.

How diligent are we in looking for opportunities. The extent to which we are or are not diligent reflects the value we actually place on the lost people around us. Evangelist Leighton Ford, wrote about the time his daughter was lost. He described it this way. “During the nearly two hours that Debbie Jean was missing, nothing else mattered. [There were] books to be read, letters answered, articles to be written, planning to be done—but it was all forgotten. I could think of only one thing: my little girl was lost. I had only one prayer, and I prayed it a thousand times, ‘Oh God, help me find her.’” He continues, “How often, I asked myself later, had I felt such a terrible urgency about people who were lost from God?”

An effective witness *looks for opportunities* to witness for Christ.

**Respect the people you approach.** (30-31)

Go to verse 30 again and look at Philip.

“Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ The Ethiopian said, ‘Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.’” (30-31)

Philip had respect for this man, and that respect showed. The man was the Court Treasurer of his country. It was a high and important position. He would have been traveling with a small caravan of lesser officials, servants and soldiers. Beyond respecting his position, Philip also respected this man as an individual, and his feelings as a non-Jew seeking God.

An insensitive person might have said, “You are reading Isaiah and find it difficult. Well, that is to be expected. After all, Isaiah was one of my people, the Jews. It’s difficult for you Gentiles to understand, but we Jews know all about it.”

Philip’s question “Do you understand what you are reading?” was both direct and

respectful. He also showed respect by waiting for the official to ask him to join him in the chariot. While it is probable that the chariot stopped when Philip approached, ever since childhood I've had this picture in my mind of Philip running alongside the chariot carrying on the conversation until the official invited him to hop on.

Philip had a genuine respect for this unsaved seeker. The lesson for us is to respect the people we approach with the gospel. It's been rightly said many times that no one wants to be someone's project. Begin with basic care and respect for every person as one created in the image of God. It doesn't require building a close, long term friendship in every case, but does require respect for that person.

So what if that person says that he or she ...

- doesn't believe in God;
- or can't believe in God with all the terrible things that happen in the world;
- doesn't like church or Christians;
- states that he believes, but has a personal concept of Christianity which is a mixture of a bit of Christianity, eastern religion and a dozen other things;
- or has more than a few rough edges and problems.

If we don't start with a genuine acceptance and respect for that person, it will be game over after the first few phrases, whether we realize it or not.

Let's move on to the fourth practical principle.

### **Begin where the person is. (35)**

Verse 35 tells us, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and *beginning from this Scripture* he preached Jesus to him." He began with the questions and ideas that were on the official's mind—not his own preconceived approach.

The passage was Isaiah 53:17-18, taken from the Greek Septuagint version commonly used in that day rather than Hebrew. In verses 32-33 Luke renders it,

“...He was led as a sheep to slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he does not open his mouth. In humiliation his judgment was taken away; who will relate his generation? For his life is removed from the earth.”

The official realized this was an unusual and significant prophecy. “*But who is it about? Who could ever fulfill it?*”

I think Philip would have started wherever the official was no matter what the question or subject—politics, natural disasters, economics, personal triumphs, struggles or tragedies. He would begin there and lead the person to know about Jesus and His relevancy to that person's situation.

We will see another example of this principle in chapter 10. There God prepared Peter for an unusual and stretching experience of relating to the Gentile Cornelius on equal footing. When he arrived at Cornelius' home, Peter did not immediately launch into a sermon, which one might expect based on his ready and sometimes impulsive speaking. Rather, he asked a question, "Why have you sent for me?" In other words, "What's on your mind? What's your concern?"

This is an important principle, "*Begin where the person is.*" Don't rush to give your answers before you know what the person's thoughts and questions are. Lee Strobel wrote a book titled *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary*. He states that he wrote it to "help advance [our] understanding of unchurched people so that [our] evangelistic efforts ... might become more effective."

Even in a brief, one-time encounter, listen and learn before you speak and sermonize. Yes, it's fine and good to use tools such as *The Four Spiritual Laws*, *Steps To Peace With God*, and *The Bridge*. But use and adapt them as you enter into the thoughts and questions of the individual.

To this point in "*Witnessing 101*", we have seen the practical principles of:

- Actively obeying God.
- Looking for opportunities.
- Respecting the people we approach. *And,*
- Beginning where the person is.

There's one more.

### **Finish the job.** (38)

The late William Clubertson, who served as President of Moody Bible Institute, said, "It is important to start right, but it is imperative to end well."

Philip finished the job with this court official. He started well, respecting the man and starting where he was at and moving on to how Jesus fits in. He presented the good news of salvation in Jesus. Go to verse 35 one more time.

"Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him."

We don't know the length of Philip's message or the entire conversation. But Philip kept on interacting with this man as long as he was open, and so he *finished the job*. This man had been seeking God—verse 27 tells us he had gone to Jerusalem "to worship." God had graciously led him to this point, and now had taken Stephen out of a successful ministry to meet with him. Being prepared by God, he now accepted Christ.

Philip *finished the job*. He didn't present the gospel and tell him, "This is how I see it. You think about it on the way home and see what you think." He kept on presenting Christ, and

when the man was ready to believe, Philip led him to Christ.

A side note: If you have not yet accepted Christ as your Savior, but have interest and question, know that is God's grace and mercy to you. *Respond to God!* You cannot presume there will always be an opportunity *someday* for you to respond.

As believers, we too need to *finish the job*. We need to be sensitive, to know when people don't want to listen or when they genuinely need more time to process the truth, more work of God in their heart. At the same time,

- a witness only in life but not word,
- a witness in general and vague terms,
- a witness that does not lead to asking the person to make a decision—one way or the other—

is not complete, does not *finish the job*.

### **Conclusion.**

We know everyone who does not yet know Jesus needs to know Him, His grace, forgiveness, life, purpose, strength and joy. People often don't see their need. That is part of Satan's strategy to keep them in blindness, to keep them in bondage to sin and death.

A fifteen year-old girl wrote a *Reverse Paraphrase* of Psalm 23, which summarizes the condition of every person who does not know Jesus Christ as Savior. She wrote,

I have no shepherd, I need a shepherd.  
I am caught in the desert.  
I am thirsty  
And no one is telling me where to go.  
I am lost and no one cares.  
I am scared of evil, because I am alone.  
I am the strongest thing in my life,  
There is no greater or more powerful  
Being to comfort or protect me.  
I must be alone with my enemies,  
With no one to help me.  
The cup of my life and my soul  
Are empty and dry.  
I seek after goodness and mercy  
But never find it.  
I have no home;  
Nothing is certain.

How do we respond to people, so many people, whose life is like this, whether they fully realize it or not? Yes, We are thankful for God's grace to us. But if we become comfortable

in His grace and are not willing, active, faithful witnesses, it points to a flaw in our spiritual development.

There is an old story about a beggar who sat at the gate of a rich man's home. The rich man provided him with food, clothing and money. One day the rich man needed to send a message as quickly as possible, but all of his servants were busy. So, he went out to the gate and asked the beggar if he would be so kind as to deliver the message. Lifting himself up with pride the beggar said, "Sir, I beg, *but I do not run errands!*"

Ungrateful? Without a doubt! But how much more ingratitude is shown by one who has been given God's grace for forgiveness, peace, life everlasting, who has been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ to in effect say to God, "I seek, I depend on and I am so grateful for Your grace, but don't ask me to deliver Your message."

*"Witnessing 101"*

- Actively obey God.
- Look for opportunities.
- Respect the people you approach.
- Begin where they are.
- Finish the job.

We are in Easter week. What a great time to renew our dedication to be Christ's witnesses. Each one of us will have opportunities between now and Easter one week from today to be a witness. Let's live these five principles this week.

As you spend time with God now,

- Thank Him that he wants to use you to reach others.
- Evaluate your witness.
- Determine to be a witness of His saving power to those around you, to those you meet this week.

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