

INTRODUCTION

During January we are considering the theme, “A Church on Purpose.” Our purpose at Green Acres is to Exalt God’s greatness; Evangelize God’s world; Equip God’s people and Express God’s love—through Jesus Christ our Lord! Last week we considered how we could love one another across the aisle *on purpose*. I have heard some good stories already about acts of love done among our membership: don’t stop!

Today, we are going to talk about a church on purpose across the street. This focus will take us outside this building’s walls and outside the circle of our fellowship. I want us to consider how we can take the good news of Jesus Christ to those who live in our community—to those who live across the street from our church and across the street from our homes.

When you read the New Testament, you cannot escape the fact that God requires we take the good news we have heard and experienced and share it with others.

C.S. Lewis wrote, “The church exists for nothing else but to draw men to Christ, to make them into little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose.”

There are people living across the street from us who don’t yet know Jesus Christ. They may be good, honest, friendly, kind people but without Jesus, they are facing a frightening eternity; and they may not even know it. God loves them but they are *lost* without Christ. The main priority of a New Testament Church is to make disciples and the first step of that is evangelism.

The English word “evangelism” is simply a transliteration of the Greek word *eu angelitzo* which means to “proclaim the good news.” We’ve got good news to share, and it’s our job to go across the street and share it with our neighbors.

For our text, I want us to look at a man named Phillip. He wasn’t one of the apostles; he was one of the seven men chosen by the church in Jerusalem to serve as a deacon, to wait on the tables when food was served to the widows. He waited on tables, but he also told people about Jesus. In the first part of Chapter 8, he was involved in a successful evangelistic crusade in a city in the region of Samaria just north of Jerusalem. The entire city was shaken by his preaching, and crowds of people were coming to Christ. But in the middle of the huge citywide rally, God called Phillip to leave the crowds and to go to witness to just one man. There is a place for mass evangelism and I thank God for Billy Graham and Luis Palau. But most of us can’t do that. I want us to see how Phillip speaks to a single individual. We call that personal evangelism and all of us can do that even if we aren’t Billy Graham. Remember, Phillip wasn’t an apostle, he was a deacon, so we see leading people to Christ is *not* just the job of the preachers; it’s the job of *anyone* who has been saved. Let’s read about how Phillip went across the street to share the good news.

Acts 8:26-40: Now an angel of the Lord said to Phillip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen

of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Phillip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

Then Phillip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Phillip asked.

“How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Phillip to come up and sit with him. The eunuch was reading this passage of scripture:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”

The eunuch asked Phillip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else? Then Phillip began with that very passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” [Always look at the footnotes in the NIV , so let’s go there to get verse 37] Phillip said, “If you believe with all your heart you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Phillip and the eunuch went down into the water and Phillip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Phillip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Phillip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

I want us to use this experience of an ordinary Christian named Phillip to serve as a case study about **HOW GOD CAN USE YOU TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS**. Let’s observe six simple steps Phillip followed to share his faith with another individual.

1. BE LISTENING FOR GOD’S DIRECTIONS

Even though Phillip was busy doing God’s work in the city, he was sensitive enough to hear God’s new message. God communicates with us in a variety of ways. In verse 26, God used an angel to tell Phillip to get moving toward the desert. God may use an angel, a ministering spirit, to direct you to witness to someone. I’ll tell you a personal story about when I believe that happened to me toward the end of this message. But, as you know, angelic encounters are rare. You may wonder why God didn’t just send the angel to tell the Ethiopian about Jesus. Throughout the Bible, angels are sent as God’s messengers, but never *once* do they share the gospel. We may think it would be easier if God would just send a huge army of evangelistic angels throughout the earth, but instead He tells *us* to share the good news. That’s because angels have never been lost and saved like we have. Peter wrote, “concerning salvation ... even angels long to look into these things.” (1 Peter 1:12)

Notice in verse 29, it wasn't an angel, but the Holy Spirit who directed Phillip to approach the chariot. If you are listening, God may speak to you through his Holy Spirit. There have been times in my life when I just knew God was speaking to my spirit. People ask, “Is it an audible voice?” My answer is, “it's LOUDER than that.”

We all know people who are a little hard of hearing. I heard of a couple that had been married for 60 years, and the husband said to the wife, “Honey, I'm proud of you!” She replied, “I'm TIRED of you, too!” He said, “Why thank you, dear.” She said, “You think I can't hear?” He said, “You're welcome.”

Sadly, many of us are have difficulty hearing God. Many of you have taken *Experiencing God* by Henry Blackaby. He says God speaks by His Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church. He speaks to reveal His will and His ways to us. Let me ask you, have you ever heard God speaking to you? Forget the audible voice way. Have you ever been reading the Bible, or hearing the Bible taught and God gives you such a strong impression about something, that you know it just didn't come from your own mind?

One of the scripture memory verses in *Experiencing God* is found in John 8:47. It's one of those verses that hits a lot of people right in the stomach and makes them go “ummph!” Jesus said, “He who belongs to God *hears* what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”

My friend, God *is* speaking these days. The question is, are you listening? I love the story of Elijah in I Kings 19. He was tired and discouraged, ready to give up and die. He desperately needed to hear from God. He went to a mountain and there was a powerful tornado so strong it tore the rocks apart, and Elijah tried to hear God in the wind, but couldn't. Then there was an earthquake and a raging fire but God wasn't in the earthquake and the fire. Then when all the noise died down, Elijah heard a gentle whisper, the King James Version called it a “still, small voice.” And that was the voice of God.

One reason we may not hear God is because we fill our lives with so much noise and activity that the static of a busy life drowns out God's voice. We want God to shout out His message to us like thunder. Are you the kind of person who has to have the radio or CD playing when you are in your car? You've got to have the television or music on when you are at home? There is a reason why we call our daily worship time a quiet time. God is speaking : are you listening?

2. AS YOU GO, LOOK FOR DIVINE APPOINTMENTS

God told Phillip to leave the crowd and head out into the desert. He was never told exactly where he was heading, instead the angel directed him toward a road that led from Jerusalem to Gaza. If Phillip had been like most of us he would have said, “Wait, Lord, first tell me exactly where I'm going, and then I'll leave.” We want to know the final destination before we begin the journey. I appreciate Phillip's faith and obedience. He took off toward the South trusting that as he got near, God would give him further instructions. It reminds me of Abraham in the Old Testament. God told Abraham to leave his home and start traveling. Abraham didn't know where he would end up, he just obeyed God.

What if God told you to pack up all your belongings and just head west? You wouldn't know whether He was sending you to Edom, Canton, Dallas or Los Angeles—would you go? He probably won't tell you to do that, but there is a great lesson for all of us. Sometimes God gives us directions and our job is to start out in the direction of His command even if we don't know the final outcome—that takes faith and obedience. When God called me to preach when I was 17 years old, I had no idea I would end up in Tyler, Texas speaking to 4,000 people each Sunday ... in fact, if I *had* known that, I would have probably been so scared I would have done something else!

It's easier to steer something when it's moving. Do you remember the old cars before power steering? Sometimes when the battery was dead, you could get somebody to push the car and then you could pop the clutch and get the engine cranked. How many of you have ever done that? You could hardly turn the steering wheel when the car was sitting still, but if somebody was pushing it, it was easier to steer. When a boat is sitting still in the water, the rudder is useless. But when the boat is moving, the rudder works to steer the boat. God can steer you in the right direction if you are already moving forward *toward* obeying him, but when you are an object at rest, remaining at rest, it's difficult for you to know God's direction. So get moving in the direction of sharing Christ with someone and watch as God directs you.

When Phillip got down to the road, he saw an African man, a government official from Ethiopia. This man was wealthy and important because he was in a chariot. This man was returning from Jerusalem and had a copy of the scroll of Isaiah. Historians tell us ancient scholars always read aloud, so Phillip hears the words and recognizes them. The Holy Spirit told Phillip to run over near the chariot, but I believe Phillip had enough common sense to recognize this was one of those “divine appointments.” Have you ever had one of those? I'll tell you about mine a little later. A “divine appointment” is when a servant of the Lord (that's you) meets someone who is obviously demonstrating an interest in spiritual things. God has a wonderful way of orchestrating these divine encounters. We just need to be smart enough to recognize one.

If you have someone at your office or school who asks you something about Jesus, or your faith, or your church, it could be that God has arranged this divine appointment. He has arranged this rendezvous just for you to share your faith with someone. Remember, the word “coincidence” is not in God's vocabulary.

3. BEGIN YOUR CONVERSATION WITH QUESTIONS

The first thing Phillip did was to ask a simple question: “Do you understand what you are reading?” Then he listened carefully to the reply. There is no single way to lead someone to Christ. There are many good witnessing plans. I've used C.S. Lovett's *Soul-winning is Easy*, *The Four Spiritual Laws*, *Evangelism Explosion*, *Continuing Witness Training*, the Roman Road, and now I am teaching our folks to use a plan called F.A.I.T.H. But none of these plans are so good that they should be used exclusively. However, all the good plans (including Phillip's) have several similarities. These next three observations are present in every good approach. The best way to start a conversation about salvation is to ask a question. It may be, “Have you heard of the four spiritual laws?” or “Suppose you were standing before God right now and He asked you,

‘Why should I let you into heaven?’ what do you think you would say?’ Actually, whenever you are trying to lead someone to Christ, I think you ought to ask a *lot* of questions before you get down to sharing the gospel. These questions help you build rapport with the person.

For years, I have taught folks to use the FIRE acrostic. It’s really simple: First, you ask them questions about their **F**amily. Ask them if they are married or have children, where they live or grew up. Almost everybody loves to talk about their family. Next ask them about their **I**nterests, wrk, hobbies etc. If you are talking to someone in their home, you may have already picked up clues, like a bass mounted over the mantle, or some kind of craft or collection. Third, ask them about their **R**eligious background, if they go to church or what church they belong to. Many times, the answer to this question may give you a clue they are already a Christian. Finally you ask them an **E**xploratory question, something that allows you to determine their spiritual condition.

Here’s the simple exploratory question in FAITH: “In your personal opinion, what do you understand it takes for a person to go to heaven?” Once you ask someone that question *listen to them*. They will either give a “faith” answer—the correct one or they will give the old “works” answer: “try to live a good life.” They may give the anti-atheist answer: “You must believe that there’s a God.” They may give an uncertain answer and admit they really don’t know.

Whatever answer they give, don’t say something like, “You dummy! Wrong! How can you say something that stupid?” Whatever answer they give, listen carefully, and let them know their answer is certainly honest, and continue to listen to them.

4. OBTAIN THEIR PERMISSION TO SHARE WITH THEM

In answer to Phillip’s question the Ethiopian official kept reading the words from Isaiah. Then the Ethiopian *asked* Phillip to explain to him what it meant. He granted him permission to share with him. That’s an important step some people totally ignore.

We’ve all been embarrassed by zealous Christians who were so pushy and tactless, their method of witnessing is to barge into a conversation and corner someone with a long monologue that sounds more like a sermon than a conversation. Those people sometimes do more harm than good because they risk turning someone off to the Good News. I don’t like pushy salesmen in a store, either. Nobody likes to feel pressured or to have the gospel message crammed down their throats.

Before I ever talk to someone about the Lord, I ask them something like, “Would you mind if I took a few minutes and shared with you what Bible says about how you can go to heaven?” If they say, “Sure” (which they usually do), I proceed. If they say, “No, not right now” or “I’m not really interested” then I don’t push the issue. God can really use a witness who is positive, cheerful, and tactful.

You can compare people who need Christ to fruit. The best time to pick fruit is when it is ripe, not green. For instance, if you pick an orange before it is ripe, you might as well throw it away because it will never ripen after it’s picked. Sometimes we face the risk of pushing someone

away from Christ if we don't recognize where they are in being ready to receive Christ. This Ethiopian official was “ripe” for salvation and Phillip recognized it. He had already been worshiping in Jerusalem—that meant he believed in one God. He was reading the Bible, which means he was hungry for spiritual truth. He even asked Phillip to explain the scriptures! May God give us the sensitivity to distinguish between those who are ready to listen to us and those who are not yet ripe for the gospel.

5. USE THE SCRIPTURES

The only scripture Phillip had to use was the scroll of Isaiah, but that was enough. The Ethiopian just “happened” to be reading from the 53rd chapter of Isaiah—the clearest chapter in the Old Testament about Jesus. Our text says starting at that point Phillip told him about Jesus. I can just imagine he said something like, “Sir, all these words are about Jesus, even though they were written hundreds of years before Jesus was born in the flesh. Jesus fulfills *all* the prophecies of the scriptures, not just in Isaiah. You see, sir, every year in Jerusalem the high priest kills a lamb and takes his blood into the Holy of Holies to sprinkle the blood for the forgiveness of our sins. But Jesus came as the true Lamb of God to take away the sin of the whole world. Like a lamb in the hands of its shearers, Jesus did not object when they slaughtered him. Sir, they beat him and nailed him to a Roman cross. Like Isaiah wrote, Jesus was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, he was pierced so we could have peace, and by Jesus' stripes, we are healed. God laid upon him the sins of all of us, mine, yours, and everyone's. He died, and they buried him in a borrowed tomb, sir. But three days later, God raised him from the dead and he was seen by hundreds of people. Then he ascended back into heaven to occupy a place of prominence beside his heavenly Father, and one day, he will come again. That's what Isaiah was talking about.”

Phillip had heard all that as part of the apostles' doctrine. But you and I have so much more to work with than Phillip had. We have John 3:16 that says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son; that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” We have Romans 6:23 that says, “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” You can lead a person to Christ using those two simple scriptures. But whatever you say, *use* the Word of God. Talk about Jesus, don't talk about church or religion. Just tell them about Jesus.

6. HELP THEM FOLLOW THROUGH ON THEIR COMMITMENT

I like the last part of Phillip's encounter with the Ethiopian. I'm sure they said a lot more than we have recorded, because the Ethiopian already knew about baptism. I believe he had already trusted Christ, and he was so excited he couldn't wait to be baptized. So, after he confessed he had trusted Christ, Phillip and the Ethiopian went down into the water. Now Baptists love that verse because if Phillip practiced sprinkling, he could have baptized him from his canteen right there in the chariot!

I'm proud of Phillip because he didn't jump out of the chariot and say, “No, baptizing is not *my* job, that's what the apostles do.” He helped the Ethiopian to *follow through* on his commitment. In golf and in tennis, it's the follow through that makes a difference. In the Christian life the

same is true. It’s not how high you jump when you get saved, it’s how straight you walk when you come down!

After the Ethiopian was baptized, we read he went on his way *rejoicing*. I like that. He trusted Jesus and he obeyed Jesus—that’s what produces joy. As the song says, “Trust and Obey, for there’s no other way to be HAPPY in Jesus, but to trust and obey!” Are you rejoicing today? Have you trusted Jesus, and obeyed Him in believers baptism? That’s the *only* way to be happy in Jesus.

Well, that’s what we learn from a simple case study on how to personally lead someone to Christ. It’s a lot easier than you think, but you’ll never know until you try.

In my book, *Do Angels Really Exist?*, I relate a personal experience that is similar to Phillip’s. I was out visiting with a couple of our men during Christian Witness Training. We went to an address of a prospect but nobody was home. As we were walking back to the car, a man was sitting on the front porch swing on the house next door to our prospect. He called to me, “Tony isn’t home tonight, but I know that James would like a visit from you.” And he pointed to the house on the other side. Although I didn’t know the guy on the swing, I figured he had seen me on television and knew who I was.

I didn’t know who James was, but when we rang the doorbell, an elderly couple invited us into their den. As I began to share with James, I soon discovered he was “ripe.” I shared the scriptures with him and by the time I asked him if he was willing to turn from his sins and place his faith in Jesus Christ, he and his wife had tears in their eyes. James and his wife accepted Christ, and I shared some follow up materials with them. Before we left I said, “James, I’ve just got to tell you that I’ve never shared with anyone who was more ready to receive Christ than you.” He said, “You don’t understand. Last week, my doctor reported that he found a large spot on my lungs, and he suspects that it is lung cancer, you see, I’ve smoked all my adult life. Two nights ago I was lying in my bed unable to sleep and I said, ‘God, I don’t really know about you, but I need you. Would you send someone to tell me about you?’” Then he looked at me and said, “How did you know to come here?” I said, “Oh, your neighbor next door was in his porch swing and he told me to drop in.” He looked at me with a strange expression and said, “That house has been vacant for two months—nobody lives there.” I just figured some stranger was sitting on the swing, until I got back to the car. My two friends said, “Pastor, are you going crazy? We didn’t see anybody sitting on that porch swing.” I thought they were kidding, until they finally convinced me they didn’t see anybody or hear anything. Who knows, maybe God sent another angel to tell me to tell someone about Jesus. Don’t wait for God to send an angel to you—go and He will guide you!

OUTLINE

HOW GOD CAN USE YOU TO SHARE THE GOOD NEWS:

1. Be listening for God’s directions
2. As you go, look for divine appointments
3. Begin your conversation with questions

F amily?

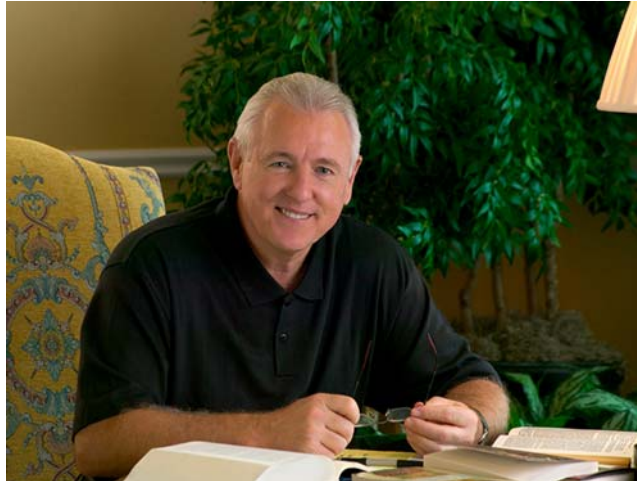
I nterests?

R eligious background?

E xploratory question: “In your opinion, what do you understand it takes for a person to go to heaven?”

4. Obtain their permission to share with them
5. Use the scriptures
6. Help them follow through on their commitment

It takes faith!



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If you borrow the majority of a message or outline, I encourage you to simply preface your remarks by saying something like: ***“Some (or “much” as the case may be) of the ideas I’m sharing in this message came from a message by Pastor David Dykes in Texas.”*** This simple citation may prevent any criticism that may be directed toward you.

To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes