



John Wesley Taylor V

PHILIP AND THE MINISTER

Tucked away in the Book of Acts we find the story of an encounter between a teacher and a student—between Philip, a deacon of the Christian Church, and the Ethiopian minister of finance, returning from a visit to Jerusalem. Here is the story:

“Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘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 the 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 Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it.’ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked. ‘How can I,’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. . . .

“The eunuch asked Philip, ‘Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?’ Then Philip 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. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?’ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:26-39, NIV).¹

As educators, what insights can we gain from this encounter? Here are perhaps a few of its lessons:

- *The Holy Spirit is the crucial guide in reaching our students.* It was a divine message that led Philip to the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. It was the Holy Spirit that prompted Philip to draw near to the Ethiopian’s chariot. And Philip was receptive to the Spirit.

- *Sometimes we find something of great value in an unpromising place.* Philip was sent on assignment to the Jerusalem-Gaza road. It was a desert road—hot, barren, and dusty, a rather unpleasant and unpromising location.²

- *Students should interact directly with the Word of God and grapple with its significance.* The Ethiopian was returning from worshipping in Jerusalem and was reading the Book of Isaiah. He was intrigued by what he read. As

educators, our ultimate goal is to provide opportunities for students to encounter the Word.

- *We are to come close and join the student on his or her journey.* Sensing the voice of the Spirit that said, “Go near to the chariot,” Philip approached the chariot and, receiving an invitation, stepped into the student’s life.

- *We should begin where the student is, focusing on his or her interests, needs, and dreams.* When the Ethiopian presented his query, Philip began at “that very passage.” He then focused on helping the Ethiopian understand what it meant for his life.

- *All interactions with our students should be Christ-centered.* Philip, beginning with that passage, “told Him the good news about Jesus.” Because all truth is God’s truth, each discipline and each topic should connect to its Source.

- *We should guide our students to spiritual insight through reflective questions.* Philip asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” Thought-provoking questions can direct students’ minds to a clearer understanding of Truth.

- *The student should experience a transformation of understanding, attitude, and lifestyle.* To learn is to change. As a result of his learning encounter, the Ethiopian expressed a desire to follow Christ. He experienced personal salvation and was baptized.

- *Students should sense that the educational experience has made a positive difference.* The Ethiopian “went on his way rejoicing.” Not because the class was over, but because of the positive influence of the learning experience on his life.

- *Sometimes we do not perceive the final result of our work.* When they came out of the water, the Holy Spirit “suddenly took Philip away,” and the Ethiopian never saw him again. Sometimes, as educators, we may not be aware of the rest of the story. Ripple effects are at times perceived only in eternity’s light.

A teacher and a student. A brief encounter. Eternal results.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Scripture quotations credited to NIV are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

2. For further study on the terrain of the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, various commentaries can be accessed at <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/acts/8-26.htm>. Various possibilities exist for the spring or stream which later in the story provided water for the baptism, as noted in the commentaries found at <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/acts/8-36.htm>.