

Discipleship – Spring 2012 – Week beginning 7th May

Home group / study notes: Hearing God and acting

This study is based on Philip and the Ethiopian official. Feel free to use as much or as little as you wish. Don't rush the discussions in order to 'finish' the study, and make sure you allow time for the prayer response.

Read Acts 8:26-27 Literally 'A messenger (αγγελος *angelos*) of the Lord'. I suppose we can't really know: but does Philip sound surprised? Or does Luke when he writes this? What can we do to help us to realise that hearing from God is *normal* for Christians?

In what ways could we be 'messengers of the Lord'? Try to share something which may help someone else – no matter how trivial it may seem. *Some people feel inadequate because they don't get 'messages from God': but could it be a matter of expectations, and that we think such 'messages' must be delivered in a certain way?*

What information was Philip given about his mission?

How much certainty do we want before we believe we have heard from God, or act on it? What is the worst that could have happened if Philip had got it wrong?

And don't forget - the times people did get it wrong would never have been recorded!

Read Acts 8:27-28 Enter the Ethiopian eunuch – a castrated male could rise to high rank, in this case, treasurer to the Queen Mother (Kandake). *NB from modern South Sudan – coincidence that there have been Christians in that region from a very early date?*

How many people today do the equivalent of 'Going to Jerusalem to worship'? Do you know anyone who attaches themselves to a church without regarding themselves as a member? *(Or because they feel excluded from being a member? – see Deut 23:1)*

Is Luke *(remember he wrote Acts)* seeing here a fulfilment of prophecy? See Isaiah 56:3-8 What might it say to us?

Read Acts 8: 29-30 Having obeyed the messenger, Philip now hears the Spirit. The narrative makes it sound like a surprising encounter for Philip. Next time you have a surprising encounter with someone showing signs of faith or asking a question, how can you be ready with a leading question? What if it is the equivalent of a foreign black eunuch – can you think of any *(equivalents, not eunuchs...)*? Would you be worried about how the church might respond?

Read Acts 8:31 Notice how Philip only asked a question, then was invited to come alongside the man. It is only when the Spirit paves the way that evangelism can be effective. But be prepared. Also notice how the Old Testament can only be 'unlocked' by knowing Jesus (see Luke 24:25-27,44-47). What could you say to someone who says they are a Christian because they keep the ten commandments or stick to Christian values?

Read Acts 8: 32-38 People will often look for the human link. A Christian might expect someone to ask, 'What do these verses mean?' – but the man asks, 'Who is he talking about'? Food for thought when we 'do' evangelism? *It is quite probable that Philip had heard Peter's witnessing in Acts 2 and used similar arguments – see eg Acts 2:38. There is very little evidence that the 'Ethiopian' man had thorough baptism preparation... see the later insertion of 8:37 (footnote in most versions) as the church got twitchy about this!*

If your group is really short of discussion, mention 'Baptism Policy'...

Read Acts 8:39-40 What do you make of Philip's sudden disappearance? *Luke seems to know that the 'Ethiopian' man went on his way rejoicing, so the departure couldn't have been that sudden.* Clearly Philip was enthused by his experience and began preaching, despite having originally been called to be an administrator (see Acts 6:1-6). Can you relate to being encouraged, given boldness, by seeing the fruit of your witnessing? Are you open to being used by God in ways other than the obvious ones for you?

Prayer response: Use the words of Zechariah in Luke 1 as a personal blessing. Pray them slowly over one another in the form overleaf:

A blessing from Luke 1:73-79

This was the oath God swore - to set you free.

Free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight all the days of your life.

And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,

To give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of all their sins.

In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon you,

To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide your feet into the way of peace.

Your response: Thank you Lord, Amen.