

Session 5



EMPOWERED

Session 6: Empowered Beyond Our Boundaries

Primary Scripture

Acts 8:26–40

Introduction — The Boundaries We Build

Human beings naturally create boundaries.

Some boundaries are healthy and necessary.

But many others quietly shape how we view:

- belonging
- worth
- identity
- acceptance
- and who we believe is “inside” or “outside”

Sometimes those boundaries are built around:

- race
- culture
- nationality
- class
- education
- politics
- church background
- personal history
- or social expectations

And often, we do not even realize how deeply those assumptions shape us.

Acts 8 tells the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch — a story that reveals something important about the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit continually pushes the Church beyond the boundaries people naturally create.

This does not mean truth disappears.

It does not mean discernment becomes unnecessary.

But it does mean the Holy Spirit consistently moves believers outward:

- toward people
- toward conversations
- and toward places

they might otherwise overlook, avoid, or misunderstand.

This session explores an important question:

How does the Holy Spirit lead believers beyond fear, assumptions, and limited understandings of who belongs?

Because Spirit-led living will continually stretch believers beyond comfort and familiarity.

Movement 1 — The Holy Spirit Often Interrupts Our Plans

Acts 8 begins with Philip in the middle of fruitful ministry.

And then the Spirit interrupts him.

Read Scripture: Acts 8:26

Philip is told to leave a successful ministry environment and go into the desert.

No detailed explanation is given.

This is important because the Holy Spirit often leads believers in ways that feel:

- inconvenient
- unclear
- unexpected
- or uncomfortable

Many people want God's guidance to arrive:

- fully explained
- emotionally comfortable
- and completely predictable

But throughout Acts, the Spirit frequently leads people one step at a time.

Read Scripture: Proverbs 3:5–6

Read Scripture: Romans 8:14

Spirit-led living requires attentiveness and trust.

Philip could have:

- delayed
- questioned
- or ignored the prompting

Instead:

“So he started out...”

This kind of responsiveness matters.

Most Spirit-led moments in everyday life are not dramatic.

They often begin as:

- quiet nudges
- opportunities to pay attention
- invitations toward compassion
- moments requiring courage
- or interruptions to our normal routines

The Holy Spirit frequently works through willingness and attentiveness.

Reflection

How do you usually respond when life becomes inconvenient, interrupted, or uncertain?

Where might God be inviting you to become more attentive or responsive right now?

Movement 2 — The Holy Spirit Leads Us Toward People We Might Overlook

Philip encounters an Ethiopian eunuch traveling home from worship in Jerusalem.

Read Scripture: Acts 8:27–28

This man would have occupied a complicated social position.

He was:

- ethnically different
- geographically distant
- socially unusual
- and likely excluded in various ways from full participation in Jewish religious life

And yet the Holy Spirit intentionally leads Philip toward him.

This matters deeply.

Throughout Acts, the Holy Spirit continually expands the Church's understanding of who God is drawing near.

The Gospel repeatedly crosses:

- ethnic boundaries
- social boundaries
- geographic boundaries
- and cultural boundaries

Read Scripture: Galatians 3:28

Read Scripture: Ephesians 2:13–19

This does not erase human differences.

But it does challenge the instinct to divide people into categories of:

- worthy and unworthy
- acceptable and unacceptable
- insider and outsider

The Spirit continually moves the Church outward toward people who might otherwise remain unseen.

This remains important today.

Churches can quietly become shaped more by comfort and familiarity than by the movement of the Holy Spirit.

But Spirit-led living repeatedly asks:

“Who am I overlooking?”

“Who do I struggle to understand?”

“Who have I unconsciously assumed does not belong?”

The Holy Spirit often works precisely in those places.

Reflection

Who do you find easiest to connect with spiritually?

Who do you find difficult to understand, relate to, or move toward?

Why do you think the Holy Spirit repeatedly pushes the Church beyond familiar boundaries?

Movement 3 — The Holy Spirit Helps Believers Listen Before Speaking

When Philip approaches the chariot, he does not begin with a lecture.

He begins with a question.

Read Scripture: Acts 8:29–35

Philip listens first.

This is important because Spirit-led witness is not primarily about:

- winning arguments
- forcing conversations
- or speaking loudly

The Holy Spirit forms believers who learn:

- attentiveness
- discernment

- humility
- and wise engagement with others

Philip meets the eunuch where he already is:
reading Scripture and searching for understanding.

The Spirit often prepares people long before believers arrive.

This changes how Christians approach relationships and conversations.

Spirit-led living requires:

- listening carefully
- paying attention
- asking thoughtful questions
- and recognizing where God may already be at work in someone's life

Read Scripture: James 1:19

Read Scripture: Colossians 4:5–6

Many Christians feel pressure to:

- say everything perfectly
- have every answer
- or force spiritual conversations unnaturally

But Acts shows something healthier.

The Holy Spirit guides believers into conversations marked by:

- wisdom
- gentleness
- attentiveness
- and truth spoken in love.

Reflection

Do you tend to listen carefully to people, or quickly move toward explaining, correcting, or persuading?

How might listening itself become part of Spirit-led living?

Movement 4 — The Holy Spirit Continually Expands the Church

By the end of the passage, the eunuch responds with joy and immediately desires baptism.

Read Scripture: Acts 8:36–39

This moment matters because it reveals the direction the Holy Spirit keeps moving throughout Acts. Outward.

The Church is continually stretched beyond:

- fear
- assumptions
- comfort
- and narrow definitions of belonging

And importantly:

Philip does not create unnecessary barriers.

He recognizes the work of God already happening in this man's life.

This does not mean discernment disappears.

But it does mean the Holy Spirit consistently challenges believers to remain open to where God is moving.

Read Scripture: Isaiah 56:3–8

This passage becomes especially powerful in light of Acts 8.

Long before Acts, God had already declared His intention to draw near to people who once stood outside the boundaries of belonging.

The Holy Spirit is always moving toward restoration, reconciliation, and welcome.

This remains one of the Church's ongoing challenges.

Fear often pushes communities inward.

But the Holy Spirit continually pushes the Church outward in mission, compassion, and welcome.

Reflection

Where do you see the Church today struggling with fear, exclusion, or limited understanding of who belongs?

How can believers remain both rooted in truth and open-hearted toward others?

A Note on the Holy Spirit and Discernment

Spirit-led living does not mean:

- abandoning wisdom
- ignoring Scripture
- or accepting everything uncritically

But it also does not mean:

- fearfully resisting change
- avoiding difficult conversations
- or refusing to move toward people different from ourselves

The Holy Spirit continually forms believers who are:

- discerning
- compassionate
- humble
- and attentive to where God is already working

Acts repeatedly reminds us:

the Church does not lead the mission of God.

The Holy Spirit does.

Our role is to remain prayerful, attentive, and willing to follow.

Formation Practice (This Week)

Practice: Becoming More Attentive to Others

Each day this week:

Step 1 — Read Slowly

Read Acts 8:26–40 slowly each day.

Pay attention to:

- how the Spirit leads Philip
- how Philip responds
- and how attentiveness shapes the entire encounter

Step 2 — Notice Your Assumptions

Throughout the day, pay attention to:

- quick judgments
- assumptions about people
- discomfort around difference
- or moments where you instinctively pull away rather than move toward others

Do not shame yourself.

Simply notice honestly.

Step 3 — Practice Listening

Have one intentional conversation this week where your primary goal is:

- listening carefully
- asking thoughtful questions
- and remaining present

Do not focus on fixing or persuading.

Step 4 — Pray This Prayer

“Holy Spirit, help me become more attentive to where You are already at work around me.”

Living It Out

Where do you most naturally build emotional, spiritual, or relational boundaries?

Who might God be inviting you to move toward with greater compassion or openness?

What would it look like to become more attentive to the Spirit's leading in everyday relationships?

Final Reflection

The Holy Spirit continually pushes the Church beyond:

- fear
- assumptions
- comfort
- and limited understandings of belonging

Acts reminds us that God is always moving outward:
toward people,
toward restoration,
and toward the ongoing mission of Jesus.

The question is not:

“Will the Holy Spirit continue stretching the Church?”

The question is:

“Will we remain willing to follow?”

Weekly Prayer

Holy Spirit,

Help me become more attentive to Your leading.

Where I build unnecessary barriers,
teach me compassion.

Where I become fearful or closed off,
teach me openness and wisdom.

Help me listen carefully,
love faithfully,
and remain willing to move where You lead.

Teach me to recognize Your work
in places and people I might otherwise overlook.

Amen.