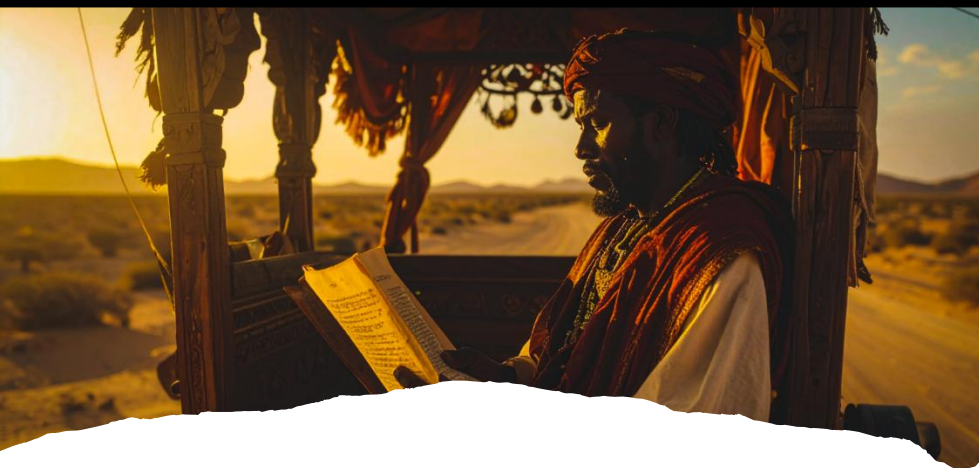


Session 7

LGBTQ+ & THE BIBLE



Acts 8 — Who Is Welcome in the Kingdom of God?



St. John's Discipleship Resources

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Session 7

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LGBTQ+ AND THE BIBLE

Session 7: Acts 8 — Who Is Welcome in the Kingdom of God?

The Ethiopian Eunuch and the Gospel That Removes Barriers

Primary Scripture: Acts 8:26–40

Additional Scriptures for Study: Deuteronomy 23:1; Isaiah 53:1–12; Isaiah 56:3–5

INTRODUCTION: THE QUESTION THAT BRINGS EVERYTHING TOGETHER

Throughout this study, we have examined biblical passages that have frequently been used to condemn or exclude LGBTQ+ people from the life of the Church.

We began by considering the importance of reading Scripture within its original historical, cultural, and linguistic context. We examined the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, the purity laws of Leviticus, Paul's discussion of idolatry in Romans, the creation account in Genesis, and the disputed Greek terminology in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy.

In each session, we have asked whether the biblical passages traditionally used against LGBTQ+ people actually address sexual orientation and committed same-sex relationships as understood today.

We have also considered a larger question: What happens when religious interpretations become barriers that prevent people from experiencing the welcome, grace, and transforming power of Jesus Christ?

Our final session turns to a remarkable encounter recorded in Acts 8.

The story concerns an Ethiopian eunuch, a person whose physical condition placed him outside the boundaries of full participation established by the Law of Moses. Yet he was seeking God, studying Scripture, and longing to understand the message of the prophets.

God responded by sending Philip to meet him.

The encounter leads to one of the most important questions in the book of Acts: What prevents this man from being baptized?

The answer demonstrated through Philip's actions is simple and profound.

Nothing.

The Ethiopian eunuch was not required to become someone else before receiving the gospel. He was welcomed through faith in Jesus Christ.

This story brings us to the heart of the Christian message. The gospel does not exist to preserve barriers between people and God. Through Jesus Christ, God is bringing people who were once considered outsiders into the life of His Kingdom.

1. A PERSON THE RELIGIOUS SYSTEM EXCLUDED

Read Acts 8:26–28

Acts introduces us to a man from Ethiopia who served as a high-ranking official in the court of the Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia.

He held a position of considerable responsibility, overseeing the royal treasury.

By the standards of his society, he was an important person. He possessed authority, enjoyed the confidence of the royal court, and had access to the resources necessary for international travel.

Yet Acts identifies him by another characteristic.

He was a eunuch.

In the ancient world, eunuchs occupied a complicated social position. Some served as trusted officials in royal households, where they could exercise significant administrative and political influence.

At the same time, their physical condition placed them outside ordinary expectations concerning masculinity, marriage, reproduction, and family life.

Their status could therefore combine considerable public authority with significant social and religious exclusion.

This contrast is important to understanding the story.

The Ethiopian official possessed power and responsibility within his own society, but he also belonged to a category of people whom the religious regulations of ancient Israel treated differently.

When he traveled to Jerusalem to worship, he was entering a religious world in which his physical condition could limit his participation.

The man who appears in Acts 8 is therefore both influential and marginalized.

He is a person of considerable importance who nevertheless encounters boundaries that other worshipers do not face.

2. THE EXCLUSION ESTABLISHED BY THE LAW

Read Deuteronomy 23:1

The Law of Moses contained a specific restriction concerning men whose reproductive organs had been damaged or removed.

Deuteronomy 23:1 excluded such men from entering the assembly of the Lord.

The precise application of this restriction within different periods of Israel's history is a matter of historical interpretation. Nevertheless, the law established a significant religious boundary concerning physical condition and participation in the covenant community.

For a eunuch seeking to worship the God of Israel, this restriction carried serious implications.

His physical condition was not something he could simply change through greater religious effort.

He could study the Law, travel to Jerusalem, pray, and seek to honor God. Yet the written regulation still identified his condition as a reason for exclusion from the assembly.

This is an important feature of the story.

The man was not being excluded because Acts describes him as rebellious, dishonest, violent, or indifferent toward God.

The boundary concerned who he was physically.

The religious system contained a restriction that could separate him from full participation even while he was sincerely seeking the Lord.

That distinction provides the foundation for understanding what happens when Philip encounters him.

3. RELIGIOUS EXCLUSION DOES NOT MEAN GOD HAS REJECTED SOMEONE

It is possible for a religious community to establish boundaries that people come to regard as unquestionable expressions of God's will.

Over time, those boundaries can become so familiar that believers stop asking whether they reflect the fullness of what God is doing.

The restriction in Deuteronomy belonged to the covenant regulations given to ancient Israel.

But the biblical story did not end with those regulations.

As we have already seen in our examination of Leviticus, the New Testament describes a new relationship with God established through Jesus Christ.

The coming of Christ changes the way people enter and participate in the covenant community.

This development is central to Acts.

The book records the gospel moving beyond its original setting and reaching people who had previously stood outside established religious boundaries.

The Ethiopian eunuch provides an early and striking example.

He represents someone whose religious participation had been restricted, yet whose desire to know God remained strong.

His story challenges the assumption that religious exclusion necessarily reflects God's final judgment about a person's worthiness to belong.

4. YET THIS MAN WAS SEEKING GOD

One of the most important details in Acts 8 is that the Ethiopian eunuch was already pursuing God before Philip met him.

He had traveled to Jerusalem to worship.

That journey required considerable effort. He had come from a distant region and was now returning home.

He was also reading from the prophet Isaiah.

These details reveal something important about his spiritual life.

He was not indifferent toward God. He was not rejecting Scripture. He was not attempting to escape the responsibilities of faith.

He was actively seeking to understand the God of Israel.

The man had made the journey to Jerusalem, participated in worship to whatever extent was available to him, and continued studying Scripture on his return.

His actions demonstrate a sincere spiritual hunger.

Yet sincerity alone had not removed the religious boundary associated with his physical condition.

This creates the central tension of the story.

A person who had reason to experience exclusion was nevertheless drawn toward God.

The religious system had limitations concerning his participation, but those limitations had not extinguished his desire for a relationship with the Lord.

The gospel was about to reach him precisely where he was.

5. GOD TAKES THE INITIATIVE

Read Acts 8:26–29

The encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian official does not begin with Philip developing a plan to reach an overlooked group of people.

It begins with God.

An angel of the Lord directs Philip to travel south along the road from Jerusalem toward Gaza.

Philip obeys.

On that road, he encounters the Ethiopian official traveling in his carriage.

The Holy Spirit then directs Philip to approach the carriage.

The sequence matters because it establishes that this encounter is not accidental.

God is actively arranging for the gospel to reach this particular person.

Philip does not first determine whether the man satisfies every expectation of the religious community.

He responds to the direction of the Spirit.

The man who had been separated from full religious participation by an ancient restriction is now the specific object of divine attention.

God sends a messenger to meet him.

This is one of the most powerful features of the passage.

The Ethiopian eunuch is not forgotten or overlooked by God.

He is seen.

His desire to understand Scripture matters, and God responds by sending someone who can explain the good news about Jesus.

6. THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS PHILIP TOWARD THE OUTSIDER

The role of the Holy Spirit deserves particular attention.

Philip does not encounter the eunuch because the religious authorities have decided to revise their policies or expand their membership requirements.

He encounters him because the Spirit directs him to do so.

The Holy Spirit moves Philip toward someone whose status would have raised questions within the established religious system.

This pattern is important throughout the book of Acts.

The Spirit repeatedly leads the early Church into circumstances that challenge inherited assumptions about who may receive the gospel.

The followers of Jesus must learn that God's work is not limited by the boundaries they have become accustomed to maintaining.

In Acts 8, Philip's responsibility is to listen and obey.

He does not need to understand every implication of the encounter before responding.

He simply follows the Spirit's direction and approaches the person God has placed before him.

This is an important lesson for the Church.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit calls believers toward people whom religious tradition has taught them to regard as outsiders.

Faithfulness may require us to recognize that God is already at work in the lives of people we have not fully welcomed.

7. PHILIP BEGINS BY LISTENING

Read Acts 8:30–31

When Philip approaches the carriage, he hears the Ethiopian official reading from Isaiah.

Philip asks whether the man understands what he is reading.

The official responds by acknowledging that he needs someone to guide him.

He then invites Philip to join him.

This is a simple exchange, but it reveals a great deal about the character of the encounter.

Philip does not begin by confronting the man's physical condition.

He does not open the conversation by discussing the restrictions found in Deuteronomy.

He does not demand an explanation of why the man traveled to Jerusalem or question whether he belongs among God's people.

Instead, Philip recognizes the man's desire to understand Scripture.

He asks a question and listens to the response.

The official, in turn, welcomes Philip's assistance.

The relationship begins with mutual engagement around the Word of God.

This is a model of Christian witness that deserves attention.

Philip meets the man where he is, recognizes his spiritual hunger, and helps him understand the Scripture he is already studying.

8. THE SCRIPTURE HE WAS READING

Read Acts 8:32–35 and Isaiah 53:1–12

The Ethiopian official was reading from Isaiah 53.

The passage describes a suffering servant who experiences humiliation, injustice, and suffering.

The official asks Philip whom the prophet is describing.

Philip begins with that passage and explains the good news about Jesus.

The connection is important because Isaiah 53 directs attention toward the suffering and redemptive work of Christ.

Philip does not offer the man a new collection of religious requirements as the basis for acceptance.

He proclaims Jesus.

The message centers upon what God has accomplished through Christ rather than upon the man's ability to overcome the restrictions that had shaped his religious experience.

For someone who had experienced exclusion, the good news of Jesus carried profound significance.

The gospel announced that reconciliation with God was being made available through Christ.

The Ethiopian official was being invited into a relationship with God grounded in the saving work of Jesus rather than in the physical qualifications associated with participation in Israel's assembly.

This is the turning point of the story.

The man who had been studying the Scriptures now hears how their message finds fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

9. THE QUESTION THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

Read Acts 8:36–38

As Philip and the Ethiopian official continue traveling, they come to water.

The official asks what prevents him from being baptized.

This is the central question of the entire story.

It is especially significant because of the man's religious and physical circumstances.

He knew what it meant to belong to a category of people who could be excluded.

He had traveled to Jerusalem to worship, and he was familiar enough with Scripture to be reading Isaiah.

Now he had heard the good news about Jesus.

The question he asks is therefore deeply meaningful.

He is asking whether there is still a barrier standing between him and full participation in the life made available through Christ.

Must he satisfy some additional requirement?

Does his physical condition disqualify him?

Is there something about his identity or circumstances that prevents him from receiving the same baptism offered to others?

The question places the issue of religious belonging directly before Philip.

And the answer comes through what Philip does next.

10. THE ANSWER IS NOTHING

Philip does not respond by telling the Ethiopian official that he must first change his physical condition. He does not require the man to become like other members of the religious community. He does not tell him that the restriction in Deuteronomy must first be resolved before baptism can occur. Instead, Philip baptizes him.

The action is decisive.

Whatever religious barriers had previously shaped the man's experience, they do not prevent him from receiving baptism through faith in Jesus Christ.

The story does not present the eunuch's physical condition as an obstacle to his welcome into the Christian community.

This is the central message of the passage.

The gospel reaches someone who had been marginalized by the religious system, and the response is not another demand for conformity.

It is baptism.

The Ethiopian official is received without being required to become someone else first.

The answer demonstrated through Philip's actions is that nothing about his status as a eunuch prevents him from receiving the good news of Jesus Christ.

11. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD BOUNDARY AND THE GOSPEL

The contrast between Deuteronomy 23 and Acts 8 is remarkable.

Deuteronomy contains a restriction concerning the participation of eunuchs in the assembly of the Lord.

Acts describes a eunuch who hears the gospel and is baptized without that restriction being imposed as a condition of acceptance.

This does not mean that Scripture is unimportant or that God's character has changed.

It means that the biblical story must be understood through the unfolding work of God.

The Old Testament records the covenant regulations that governed Israel's life.

The New Testament proclaims the fulfillment of God's redemptive purposes through Jesus Christ.

The Ethiopian eunuch stands at the intersection of these two realities.

He is a person whose physical condition had been associated with exclusion under the old covenant regulations.

Yet through the gospel, he is welcomed into the new life made available through Christ.

The story demonstrates that the coming of Jesus opens a way of belonging that cannot be reduced to the boundaries established by the Mosaic Law.

12. GOD HAD ALREADY PROMISED A DIFFERENT FUTURE

Read Isaiah 56:3–5

The welcome extended to the Ethiopian eunuch does not appear without preparation in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 56 contains a remarkable promise concerning foreigners and eunuchs.

The passage addresses people who might believe they have no future among God's people.

Foreigners are told not to assume that the Lord will exclude them.

Eunuchs are told not to regard themselves as people without a lasting place or future because they cannot have children.

God promises blessing and an enduring name to those who are faithful to Him.

This promise is especially significant when read alongside Deuteronomy 23.

The earlier law established a restriction.

The prophetic promise announces a future in which eunuchs who honor God will receive a place and a name within His house.

The movement is from exclusion toward welcome.

Isaiah does not portray these individuals as forgotten by God.

Instead, God speaks directly to their fear of being excluded and promises that their faithfulness will not be overlooked.

The story in Acts 8 provides a powerful illustration of that promise taking shape through the gospel.

13. A NAME GREATER THAN SONS AND DAUGHTERS

The promise in Isaiah 56 is especially meaningful because of the social circumstances surrounding eunuchs.

In the ancient world, family lineage and the ability to produce children were closely connected to a person's future, inheritance, and remembrance.

A eunuch who could not have children might be regarded as someone without descendants to preserve his name.

Isaiah addresses that fear directly.

God promises an enduring name that is not dependent upon having sons or daughters.

This is a profound statement about human worth and belonging.

The value of a person before God is not determined by reproductive capacity.

Nor is a person's future with God limited by whether that individual can fulfill the social expectations associated with marriage and family.

God promises something greater.

He offers a lasting place within His household.

For the Ethiopian eunuch, this promise would have carried particular significance.

His inability to fulfill certain expectations of ancient family life did not mean that his relationship with God was without hope.

God's promise extended beyond those limitations.

14. ISAIAH'S PROMISE AND PHILIP'S OBEDIENCE

When Isaiah 56 and Acts 8 are read together, the connection becomes especially powerful.

Isaiah promises that eunuchs who commit themselves to the Lord will not be forgotten or excluded from God's blessing.

Acts records a eunuch who is actively seeking God and studying Isaiah.

The Holy Spirit then directs Philip to meet him.

Philip explains the good news about Jesus, and the man is baptized.

The sequence reflects the movement from prophetic promise toward the expanding welcome of the gospel.

God had already announced that the future of eunuchs among His people would not be defined solely by exclusion.

Now, through Jesus Christ, a eunuch receives the good news and enters the Christian community through baptism.

The man does not need to overcome his physical condition.

He needs to hear and respond to the gospel.

This is the difference between defining a person's relationship with God through an inherited boundary and recognizing what God is doing through Christ.

The Spirit leads Philip to participate in the fulfillment of God's welcoming purpose.

15. THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH AS AN EARLY AFRICAN BELIEVER

The Ethiopian official also represents the expanding geographical reach of the gospel.

He comes from a region beyond the immediate setting of Jerusalem and Judea.

His encounter with Philip demonstrates that the message of Jesus is moving outward toward people from different nations and cultures.

He is one of the earliest individually identified African believers recorded in Acts.

His position as a royal official suggests that he had responsibilities and connections extending far beyond the place where he encountered Philip.

The narrative does not provide a detailed account of his later ministry or describe everything that happened after he returned home.

Nevertheless, his baptism represents an important moment in the expansion of the Christian message.

The gospel is reaching someone who differs from Philip in nationality, cultural background, social position, and physical circumstances.

Those differences do not prevent the encounter.

The Holy Spirit brings the two men together, and the message of Jesus becomes the foundation for their relationship.

The story demonstrates that the Kingdom of God is not confined to one nation, one culture, or one established religious community.

16. GOD SEES THE OUTSIDERS

One of the most encouraging themes in Acts 8 is that God sees people whom religious communities may overlook.

The Ethiopian eunuch was traveling home after worshiping in Jerusalem.

From the perspective of the religious authorities, he may have been only one traveler among many.

But God knew where he was.

God knew what he was reading.

God knew that he was seeking understanding.

And God sent Philip to meet him.

The encounter reveals something important about God's character.

People who feel forgotten by religious institutions are not necessarily forgotten by God.

Those who have been told that they do not fully belong may nevertheless be the very people toward whom the Holy Spirit is directing the Church.

The Ethiopian eunuch did not have to force his way into Philip's attention.

God took the initiative.

This is an essential part of the good news.

The grace of God reaches beyond the boundaries that human communities establish.

17. GOD SENDS SOMEONE TO MEET THEM

God's concern for the Ethiopian eunuch is expressed through Philip's obedience.

The Holy Spirit could have allowed the official to continue reading Isaiah without assistance.

Instead, God sends someone who can explain the message of Jesus.

Philip becomes the means through which the man hears and understands the gospel.

This is an important responsibility for the Church.

Christians are called to participate in what God is doing in the lives of others.

That participation begins with listening to the Holy Spirit and being willing to approach people who may not fit familiar religious expectations.

Philip does not need to control the outcome of the encounter.

He is simply faithful to the direction he receives.

He approaches the carriage, listens to the man's question, explains Scripture, and responds when the official asks to be baptized.

His obedience creates an opportunity for someone who had been marginalized to experience the welcome of Christ.

The Church continues to face the same calling.

We are not responsible for deciding in advance which people God may be seeking.

We are responsible for responding faithfully when the Spirit leads us toward them.

18. GOD REMOVES THE BARRIERS

The central action of Acts 8 is the removal of a barrier to participation in the life of God's people.

The Ethiopian official's status as a eunuch had religious significance under the old covenant regulations.

Yet Philip does not impose that restriction as a condition of baptism.

The gospel opens a door that had previously appeared closed.

This is not a rejection of holiness.

It is a recognition that belonging to Christ is not established through the physical qualifications and ritual boundaries of the Mosaic covenant.

The man receives the gospel and is baptized.

His acceptance is grounded in Jesus Christ.

This distinction is especially important for Christian communities that have inherited traditions of exclusion.

Sometimes churches become so focused upon maintaining boundaries that they fail to recognize the people who are sincerely seeking God.

They may assume that their responsibility is to determine who must change before being allowed to belong.

Acts 8 presents a different pattern.

The Holy Spirit leads the Church toward someone who has been excluded, and the gospel becomes the means through which that person is welcomed.

19. THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH AND LGBTQ+ CHRISTIANS

The Ethiopian eunuch should not be described as a gay man simply because he was a eunuch.

The ancient category of eunuch is not equivalent to the modern concept of homosexuality or sexual orientation.

Eunuchs occupied a distinctive social and physical position within the ancient world, and their circumstances cannot simply be equated with those of LGBTQ+ people today.

However, the story provides an important biblical parallel concerning religious exclusion.

Many LGBTQ+ Christians have experienced a similar tension between their desire to know God and the barriers established by religious communities.

Some have grown up loving Jesus, studying Scripture, praying, and participating in the life of the Church.

Yet they have also been told that something about who they are prevents them from fully belonging.

They may be permitted to attend worship but denied membership, baptism, leadership, marriage, or other forms of participation.

Like the Ethiopian official, they may find themselves asking whether there is something about their identity that disqualifies them from receiving the welcome of Christ.

Acts 8 does not directly address modern sexual orientation.

But it does demonstrate that the Holy Spirit can lead the Church beyond inherited boundaries and toward people who have been excluded.

The story challenges us to ask whether our understanding of belonging reflects the expanding welcome of the gospel.

20. WHAT MUST CHANGE BEFORE SOMEONE CAN BELONG?

One of the most significant features of the encounter is what Philip does not require.

He does not tell the eunuch to become physically different.

He does not demand that the man overcome the circumstances that had contributed to his exclusion.

He does not postpone baptism until the official can demonstrate that he fits the expectations of the existing religious community.

Instead, Philip responds to the man's faith in Jesus Christ.

This raises an important question for contemporary Christians.

When someone comes seeking God, what requirements do we place between that person and the welcome of the gospel?

Do we require people to adopt our cultural expectations before they may belong?

Do we assume that their differences must be corrected before they can participate in the life of the Church?

Or do we recognize that God may already be at work in their lives?

The Ethiopian eunuch's story does not suggest that Christian discipleship requires no transformation.

Every believer is called to grow in holiness and obedience to Christ.

But the transformation of Christian life begins through a relationship with Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit.

The gospel does not require people to become acceptable to a religious institution before they may encounter the grace of God.

21. BAPTISM AS A SIGN OF BELONGING

Baptism is a central part of the Ethiopian eunuch's story.

The man hears the good news about Jesus and responds by asking to be baptized.

His question reveals a desire not merely to learn about Christianity but to participate in the life made available through Christ.

Baptism represents a public response to the gospel and identification with Jesus.

For someone whose religious status had been complicated by exclusion, receiving baptism carried particular significance.

Philip's response communicates that the man is not disqualified because of his physical condition.

He may respond to Jesus and receive baptism.

The act becomes a visible demonstration of welcome.

This is why the story is so important to the larger message of Acts.

The gospel is not simply reaching new geographical locations.

It is reaching people who had previously been regarded as outsiders.

Through Christ, they are being welcomed into a community defined by faith rather than by the old boundaries of religious participation.

22. HE WENT ON HIS WAY REJOICING

Read Acts 8:39–40

After the baptism, Philip is taken away by the Spirit, and the Ethiopian official continues his journey.

Acts tells us that he goes on his way rejoicing.

This detail provides a fitting conclusion to the encounter.

The man began the story traveling home from Jerusalem while reading Scripture and seeking understanding.

He encountered Philip, heard the good news about Jesus, and received baptism.

Now he continues his journey with joy.

The narrative does not describe him as returning home burdened by new restrictions or uncertain whether he truly belongs.

His response is rejoicing.

The encounter has brought him into a new understanding of God's grace.

The person who asked what prevented him from being baptized has received his answer.

Nothing prevented him.

His joy reflects the freedom and welcome he has experienced through the gospel.

23. THE GOSPEL OPENS THE DOOR

The Ethiopian eunuch's story reveals a pattern that runs throughout the ministry of Jesus and the expansion of the early Church.

God sees people who have been overlooked.

God reaches toward those who have been pushed to the margins.

God sends messengers who are willing to follow the Holy Spirit.

And through the gospel, God opens doors that human beings may have assumed should remain closed.

This pattern does not mean that every religious boundary is meaningless or that the Church should abandon the call to holiness.

It means that our understanding of holiness and belonging must be shaped by Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit.

The gospel calls people into a transformed relationship with God.

It does not authorize the Church to preserve exclusion for its own sake.

The Ethiopian eunuch demonstrates that a person who had been restricted under the old covenant could be welcomed through faith in Jesus.

The Church must therefore remain attentive to the possibility that God is calling us beyond boundaries we have inherited.

24. THE CHURCH MUST LISTEN TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Philip's role in the story is essential.

He listens when God directs him to the road.

He listens when the Spirit tells him to approach the carriage.

He listens when the Ethiopian official explains his need for understanding.

And he responds when the man asks to be baptized.

At no point does Philip attempt to place himself above the work God is doing.

He participates in that work.

This is an important model for Christian communities.

The Church is called to proclaim the gospel faithfully, but it must also remain open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Religious tradition can provide wisdom and continuity, but it must never become an excuse for refusing to recognize what God is doing.

When the Spirit directs believers toward people who have been excluded, the appropriate response is not automatically to defend the exclusion.

It is to listen, examine Scripture carefully, and discern how God is calling the Church to respond.

Philip's obedience demonstrates that faithfulness sometimes requires movement beyond familiar boundaries.

The Church must be willing to follow.

25. WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED THROUGH THIS STUDY?

Over the course of these seven sessions, we have examined several biblical passages that have shaped Christian attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people.

We began by recognizing that Scripture must be interpreted within its original historical, cultural, and linguistic context.

We examined the story of Sodom and Gomorrah and the importance of understanding its themes of violence, injustice, and the mistreatment of strangers.

We studied the Holiness Code in Leviticus and considered the relationship between Israel's covenant regulations and Christian life under the New Covenant.

We explored Paul's argument in Romans 1–2, recognizing the central importance of idolatry, cultural assumptions, and the warning against religious self-righteousness.

We returned to Genesis and examined the creation of a suitable partner as God's answer to human loneliness, along with Jesus' teaching concerning covenant faithfulness in marriage.

We then examined the Greek words *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi*, recognizing the importance of translation history and the dangers of imposing modern identity categories upon ancient terminology.

Now, in Acts 8, we encounter a person who was seeking God despite the barriers established by the religious system.

The Holy Spirit directs Philip toward him, the gospel is proclaimed, and the man is baptized.

The study therefore concludes not with another argument about exclusion but with a demonstration of God's welcome.

26. THE FINAL QUESTION: WHAT PREVENTS ME?

The Ethiopian eunuch's question remains relevant because people continue to ask it.

Some ask whether their past prevents them from coming to Christ.

Others wonder whether their family background, nationality, social status, physical condition, or personal circumstances place them outside God's welcome.

Many LGBTQ+ people have asked the same question after hearing religious messages that describe them as unacceptable or unworthy of full participation in Christian community.

The story of Acts 8 offers a powerful response.

The Ethiopian official did not have to overcome the condition that had contributed to his exclusion.

He heard the gospel of Jesus Christ, responded in faith, and was baptized.

The Holy Spirit had already been at work, directing Philip toward him.

The Church's role was not to preserve the barrier.

It was to proclaim Jesus and respond faithfully to the work of God.

This is the central challenge of the passage.

When someone comes seeking Christ, we must be careful not to place obstacles where the gospel has opened a door.

The Church belongs to Jesus Christ, and its mission is to make His good news known.

The question is not whether we can find reasons to exclude people who are different from ourselves.

The question is whether we are willing to follow the Holy Spirit as God draws people into His Kingdom.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

1. Before this study, what did you know about the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8?
2. What responsibilities did the Ethiopian official hold within the royal court?
3. Why did eunuchs occupy a complicated social position in the ancient world?
4. What restriction concerning eunuchs appears in Deuteronomy 23:1?
5. How might that restriction have affected a eunuch who sincerely desired to worship the God of Israel?
6. Why is it important that the Ethiopian official was already seeking God before Philip met him?
7. What does his journey to Jerusalem reveal about his commitment to worship?
8. What does his reading of Isaiah reveal about his desire to understand Scripture?
9. Who directed Philip to travel along the road toward Gaza?
10. What role did the Holy Spirit play in bringing Philip and the Ethiopian official together?
11. Why is it significant that God took the initiative in arranging this encounter?
12. How did Philip begin his conversation with the Ethiopian official?
13. What can the Church learn from Philip's willingness to listen before speaking?

14. What passage of Isaiah was the Ethiopian official reading when Philip approached him?
15. How did Philip use that passage to explain the good news about Jesus?
16. Why is the official's question about baptism so important to the story?
17. What might the question have meant to someone whose religious participation had previously been restricted?
18. What conditions did Philip require the official to change before baptizing him?
19. How does Philip's response contrast with the restriction found in Deuteronomy 23?
20. What promise does God make to eunuchs in Isaiah 56:3–5?
21. Why is the promise of an enduring name particularly meaningful for someone who cannot have children?
22. How does Isaiah 56 help us understand the significance of the encounter in Acts 8?
23. Why should we avoid simply equating the ancient category of eunuch with modern LGBTQ+ identities?
24. What meaningful parallels nevertheless exist between the religious exclusion experienced by eunuchs and the experiences of some LGBTQ+ Christians?
25. How does the story challenge the assumption that religious exclusion always reflects God's final intention?
26. What can Christian communities learn from Philip's willingness to follow the Holy Spirit beyond familiar boundaries?
27. Why is baptism such an important expression of welcome and belonging in this passage?
28. What is the significance of the Ethiopian official continuing his journey with joy?
29. What barriers do churches sometimes place between people and the welcome of Jesus Christ?
30. How can Christians distinguish between the call to holiness and the unnecessary exclusion of people who are sincerely seeking God?
31. Which of the seven sessions has most significantly challenged or deepened your understanding of Scripture?
32. How has this study changed the way you understand the relationship between biblical authority, historical context, and Christian inclusion?
33. What does the story of the Ethiopian eunuch teach you about the character of God?
34. How might you respond to someone who asks whether their sexual orientation prevents them from belonging to Christ?

35. What would it mean for the Church to answer the question of welcome through its actions, just as Philip did?

KEY TAKEAWAY

Acts 8 tells the story of an Ethiopian eunuch who was sincerely seeking God despite belonging to a category of people whose participation had been restricted under the Law of Moses.

Deuteronomy 23:1 established a boundary concerning eunuchs, but Isaiah 56:3–5 announced a promise of blessing, belonging, and an enduring name for eunuchs who committed themselves to the Lord.

The Ethiopian official was already pursuing God. He had traveled to Jerusalem to worship and was studying the prophet Isaiah when the Holy Spirit directed Philip to meet him.

Philip explained the good news about Jesus, and the official asked what prevented him from being baptized.

Philip did not require him to change his physical condition or become someone else before receiving the gospel.

He baptized him.

The story demonstrates the movement from religious exclusion toward the welcome made available through Jesus Christ.

Although the ancient category of eunuch is not equivalent to modern sexual orientation, the passage provides an important biblical example of the Holy Spirit leading the Church toward someone who had been marginalized by religious boundaries.

The gospel reaches the outsider, and the barrier does not prevent participation in the life of Christ.

This final session also brings together the central principles of our study.

Scripture must be interpreted faithfully within its original context. Ancient cultural assumptions should not automatically be imposed upon modern circumstances. Christian holiness remains important, but it must be understood through Jesus Christ and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

Most importantly, the Church must be careful not to use inherited interpretations to place obstacles between people and the grace of God.

The Ethiopian eunuch asked what prevented him from being baptized. The answer demonstrated by the gospel was nothing.

God sees the outsiders, the forbidden, the forsaken, and the forgotten.

God sends someone to meet them.

God removes the barriers.

God welcomes them into His family.

And when someone comes seeking Jesus Christ and asks, “What prevents me?” the answer of the gospel is simple:

NOTHING!

CLOSING PRAYER

God of grace and welcome, thank You for the good news of Jesus Christ and for the way Your Spirit continues to reach people whom others may have overlooked or excluded.

Thank You for the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, a man who sought You even when the religious system placed boundaries around his participation. Thank You that You saw him, knew his desire to understand Your Word, and sent Philip to share the gospel with him.

Forgive us for the times we have allowed religious assumptions, inherited interpretations, or fear of difference to become barriers between people and Your love.

Give us the humility to recognize that You may already be at work in the lives of those we have not fully welcomed.

Teach us to listen to the Holy Spirit as Philip did. Give us the courage to follow when You lead us beyond familiar boundaries, and the wisdom to understand Scripture faithfully within its historical and cultural context.

We pray especially for those who have been told that something about who they are prevents them from belonging to You. May they discover the grace of Jesus Christ, the presence of Your Holy Spirit, and the joy of knowing that they are seen and loved by You.

Help Your Church become a community where people encounter the truth of Your Word, the transforming power of Your Spirit, and the welcome of Your Kingdom.

May we never confuse the preservation of religious barriers with faithfulness to the gospel.

And when someone comes seeking You and asks what prevents them from receiving Your grace, may our words and actions reflect the welcome demonstrated through Jesus Christ.

Thank You that the gospel opens doors, restores hope, and brings people into the family of God.

In Jesus' name, Amen.