



We are continuing our voyage of discovery through the book of Acts which is teaching us about how the early church Christians prayed. We're used to thinking of prayer as 'talking to God', but what about the other side of the conversation: 'listening to God'? Tom engaged us with hilarious stories of the frustrating way a smartphone finishes your sentences for you. You end up imploring it to 'stop guessing and let me finish the sentence'! **Read: Acts 8: 26 – 40.**

### 1. What do we know about the two characters in this story?

- **Philip**
  - One of the first of Jesus' original disciples, **John 1:43**: he spent a lot of time with Jesus during His ministry.
  - Commissioned by the risen Jesus, to 'go and make disciples of all nations .....' **Matthew 28: 16-20.**
  - No-one else in the Bible is titled 'The Evangelist' which means 'someone who announces good news'.
- **The Ethiopian Official**
  - An Ethiopian government official – Queen (Mother) Candace's personal treasurer.
  - He'd gone to Jerusalem to worship so he was an African Jew, either by birth or by conversion.
  - He was a 'eunuch', as were all male officials selected to serve in a female household. In order to avoid any questions about motives or about the royal succession, these men had to be physically incapable of siring children: either from birth, or by an enforced operation. This important man could never have children.
  - It was a source of deep shame in the ancient world if you were unable to have children, so in spite of being a senior government official, this man was a social outcast, he was an outsider.
  - He was reading **Isaiah 53:7-8** which resonated completely with his situation: '...Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth'. So his question to Philip is simple: 'Who is the prophet talking about? Who is this other person - scorned because he cannot have children?'

Thought: How would we continue the conversation with such an apparently open and easy 'inquirer'?  
What skills would we use to convince this man that the answer to his question is Jesus?

### 2. How was Philip's approach so successful?

- **Philip listened to God. Verses 26-29**
  - He immediately obeyed when told by the Lord to go to a particular road so he was in the right place at the right time to meet the Ethiopian's group of travellers. Then the Spirit told Philip to approach the chariot. We don't know how Philip discerned the Lord/the Spirit speaking, whether through a dream or by some compelling intuition. But Philip was now in the right place at the right time to talk to this particular man.
- **Philip listened to the Biblical passage and the man's question. Verses 30-34**
  - In accordance with ancient tradition, the man was reading aloud.
  - It was accepted practice for a lonely stranger on a desert road to attach himself to a caravan, so Philip asks if he understands the passage from Isaiah and the man invites him to explain it. By now Philip knows who he is and has a good idea of his back story: his real question is, 'Who is this man who was humiliated, rejected and childless? I want to know him.'
  - God's plan has brought Philip to a place where he can meet this Ethiopian exactly at his point of need.
- **Philip begins with the 'very passage of scripture' the man was reading. Verse 35.**
  - Philip begins with **Isaiah 53: 7-8** and explains how it is speaking of Jesus on the cross.
  - Then **Isaiah 56: 4-5** would have been of huge and powerful significance to this man:
    - a. He need have no fear of being unable to perpetuate his name: God will give him so much more.
    - b. In Christ God gives him an everlasting name and because of Christ's death and resurrection he can have eternal life, which is far superior to earthly life.
    - c. You might be an outsider now, but Jesus will make you an insider for ever.
- **Somehow it is no surprise the man wants to be baptized immediately and 'went away rejoicing', vv 36-40.**

Thoughts:

1. Can we try to follow Philip's example and let God lead us to an opportunity to share Jesus?
2. Philip listened to the Ethiopian's story and didn't rush in, imposing his own agenda.
3. When we're praying for opportunities to share Jesus with our friends or family, do we ever hear God saying, 'stop guessing and let Me finish the sentence'!
4. As a church we are asking God to show us how he wants us to continue to be a 'Growing Community of Grace'. We are trying to learn how to pause, and let God finish the sentence.