

Study 2: Acts 8:26–40

& Invitation to Faith

INTRODUCTION (11:00–11:35 a.m.)

GATHERING (10 min)

Allow your group to gather. Begin as close to 11 a.m. as possible, but as you wait, make conversation around your table. Here are some fun “get to know you” questions if you need suggestions:

- If you could choose to do anything for a day, what would it be?
- Have you ever had a nickname growing up? What was it and what effect did it have on you?
- If you could travel in time, when and where would you go?

WELCOME (1 min)

Welcome your group:

Good morning! Great to see you all again! I look forward to being together in Scripture, and I am eager to hear what God has to say to us. Remember, as I mentioned yesterday, that toward the end of our study, there will be a time to consider what next step of faith God is inviting each of us to take as we hear the gospel and have an opportunity to decide to follow Jesus. I will explain more when we get there, but you can read more on page 33 in your handbook.

ICEBREAKER (20min, ~2 min/person)

Lead your group in an icebreaker:

Let's go around and share. What have you been learning at the conference? Have you had any spiritual encounters?

I also want to acknowledge that this morning's session may have been heavy for you. Feel free to pass or share what God is bringing up from this morning's talks.

OVERVIEW (3 min)

Urbana has already been a very full experience! In just two days, we have been exploring the exhibit hall, attending seminars, hearing testimonies and teachings, eating together, worshiping together, and possibly not sleeping enough. Now as we enter our second study, this is another chance to discover how the Bible can be relevant to our lives.

- If you were able to share a lot with the group yesterday, great! Today let's make space for each other, and if you haven't had a chance to share much. We'd love to hear from you in our study today.
- And don't forget about the group norms we talked about yesterday. (Ask for a volunteer to read your list of group norms aloud for everyone to remember).

PRAYER (1 min)

Pray and ask God to help you as you study today's passage.

SCRIPTURE (11:35–12:05 p.m.)

Open to today's passage on page 30 in your handbook.

BACKGROUND (2 min)

Share some background for this passage:

Last night, we heard Bishop Claude teach the story of Stephen. In Acts 6, Stephen and six other ethnic-minority believers are appointed for leadership to create an effective structure that will provide for the vulnerable people among them (the widows). Then Stephen is killed for his offensive speech against the religious leaders and his declaration that God is not limited simply to the physical location of the temple. Persecution breaks out against the church in Jerusalem and the disciples are scattered throughout neighboring areas, but they preach about Jesus wherever they go. One of the other leaders chosen alongside Stephen is Philip, who ends up in Samaria preaching about Jesus, baptizing, casting out impure spirits, and healing people, which brings great joy in the city!

In our study today, we will encounter a man who is called a “eunuch,” which means that he had been castrated and unable to have sex (his testes or entire genitals removed). This allowed men to work closely with the queen without any chance of sexual contact or pregnancy. Jewish people opposed this practice of castration, and eunuchs were therefore excluded from the Jewish community (Deuteronomy 23:1).

THE TEXT (5 min)

Read today's Bible study passage out loud. Then invite your group to re-read the passage quietly on their own:



ACTS 8:26–40 (NIV)

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet.

²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

³¹ "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth."

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ 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?" ³⁷* ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

*Acts 8:37 Some manuscripts include here Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." The eunuch answered, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

OBSERVATION (5 min)

Let's discuss a couple things that will help us see the text.

1. What are the locations mentioned in this passage?
2. List out all the actions you see taking place. Who is doing what?

INTERPRETATION (18 min)

Now let's discuss a few questions that will help us discover and understand the text.

1. Let's talk about Philip and the Ethiopian man. What do we know about these two people—their backgrounds, their spiritual journeys, etc.?
2. Ethiopia was not just the nation as we know it today but included all of Africa south of Egypt, so the man's travel to Jerusalem would have taken many days or even a few weeks. Obtaining a scroll of Isaiah would have been very expensive. Why do you think this man is going to such great lengths to seek the God of Israel?
3. Notice that v. 32–33 quote Isaiah 53:7–8. Why might the man have been interested in this specific section of the text? How do you imagine Philip used these verses to explain the good news about Jesus?
4. How do we see God at work transgressing social, cultural, and economic boundaries? How would you describe the impact that God makes in the life of this one man? How might this extend to the community the Ethiopian man is returning to?

INVITATION TO FAITH SCRIPT (12:05–12:30 p.m.)

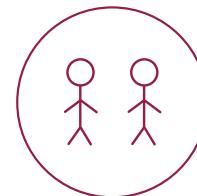
Have people take turns reading through the next section, including the table at the end.

ACTS 8 AND A GOSPEL SUMMARY (3 min)

We want to be like both Philip and the Ethiopian, receiving the Word deep into our hearts and whole-heartedly following Jesus. We also want to open the Word with our family, friends, and communities. We will have a chance in a few minutes to invite our friends and communities to explore Jesus in the Gospel of Luke with us.

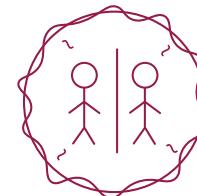
First, let's consider what it means to actually follow Jesus. We will have a chance to make that decision now, as we talk about these four steps.

1 Read this Gospel Summary



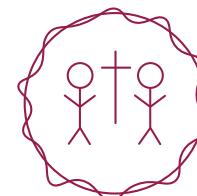
DESIGNED FOR GOOD

In Genesis, we see that God created the world to be a perfect place. We were created for right relationship with God, with each other, and with creation. Things were perfect!



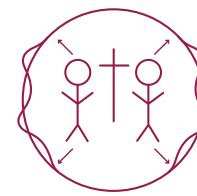
DAMAGED BY EVIL

We long for these kinds of right relationships. But we thought we could run our lives better than God. Instead of placing God at the center, we put our own selfish desires at the center. Then everything fell apart. We damaged our relationship with God, with each other, and with all creation. Today we live in a broken, messed-up world. We have war, depression, anxiety, loneliness, abuse, suicide, drug addiction, shootings, etc. We deeply long for every relationship to be restored. Fortunately, God didn't leave us in this mess.



RESTORED FOR BETTER

Motivated by a deep love for us and creation, God relocated into our world in the person of Jesus. He took all our brokenness onto himself. By dying on the cross and rising again, Jesus broke the power of our broken world. If we're willing to let God take his place at the center of our lives again, and if we are willing to trust Jesus with our lives, we can be restored to a right relationship with God. But that's not the end of the story.



SENT TO HEAL

Once we choose to follow Jesus, he sends us into the world to bring his love and hope, power and justice wherever we go. We get to live and declare this good news as Jesus' witnesses, living lives full of God's love and courage.

This gospel presentation is adapted from James Choung's book, True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing In (IVP, 2008)



2 Consider Who Is at the Center

Now we have a decision to make. Will we live with ourselves at the center of the story, or will we let God become the center? In order to be sent to heal, we must acknowledge our wounds and turn to Jesus for the healing we need. This is an invitation to turn from our selfishness and trust Jesus with our lives. This is what the Bible means when it says, "Repent of your sins." If we are at the center of the story, our attempts to heal will be warped by our brokenness. What would it take for you to trust Jesus with your life and relationships?

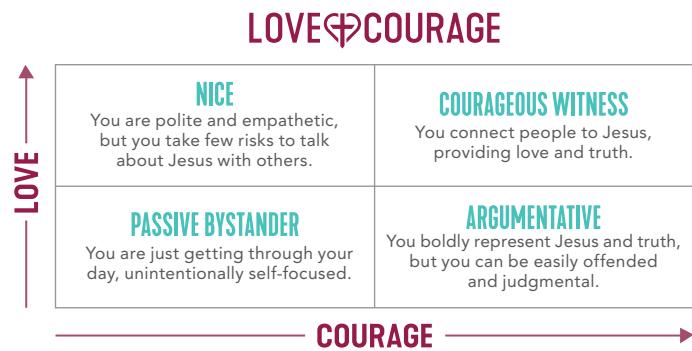
PONDER YOUR RESPONSE (2 min)

Let's read the "I'm a Follower of Jesus" and the "I'm Considering Following Jesus" boxes in Step 3 out loud.

3 Reflect on Your Life

I'M A FOLLOWER OF JESUS

For those of us following Jesus, our challenge is to grow as a courageous witness by sharing God's love with others. Look at this Love and Courage diagram. Which category best describes your mood this week?



Take a moment to pray, *"Jesus, fill me with your love, healing, and courage. Please give me the joy of opening the story of Jesus (in Luke) with some of the seekers and skeptics in my life. Bring a few people to mind right now."*

Write their names here (We will have a chance to invite them in a minute).

I'M CONSIDERING FOLLOWING JESUS

Trusting Jesus includes embracing, through the cross and resurrection, God's promise that we can be different people and receive a change of heart, both now and for eternity. It takes courage to make Jesus the center of your life and follow his leadership. Are you ready to do that?

It's important to interact with God about this, and like the Ethiopian man, we can ask God questions. Let's take a moment of silence.

"Jesus, are you inviting me to follow you?" (30 seconds of silence).

GUIDED REFLECTION (4 min)

Let's take a few minutes to re-read the boxes on your own. If you consider yourself a follower of Jesus already, I would encourage you to read the first box. If you are considering following Jesus, I'd suggest the second box.

Pause to allow for re-reading.

LISTENING (1 min)

Let's take a moment to listen to Jesus about our next steps. You can use the prayer prompts that are bolded in the boxes.

Allow about 30 seconds for listening.

SHARING (10 min)

I would love to hear how you are responding today. Let's go around the table and each share something about your response.

Leader, please go first to open the sharing.

Thank you all so much for sharing!

4 Share With a Friend (5 min)

This is an important moment. We want to include friends and family at Urbana and back home in our growth. Whether you just decided to follow Jesus or you're still considering, in a minute, let's text someone so they can support you.

Others of us are considering being a courageous witness. We have fantastic exploratory Bible studies for both seekers and Christians in the Gospel of Luke. Let's take a minute to look them over and see which one stands out to you most.

Everyone take a moment to look at the Exploratory Studies provided at your table.

Let's take out our phones. Here are some suggestions of things you might text a friend. Choose one or feel free to put things in your own words:

- "Hearing the story of Jesus was helpful. I'm still trying to decide if he is trustworthy with my life."
- "Hey! I just decided to follow Jesus here at Urbana!"
- "I'm at this conference talking about faith and I'm curious, what is your spiritual background? Want to talk about it?"
- "I'm at a conference where I was given a four-week discussion series on Jesus and labels. It looks interesting to me. I want to do this back on campus ... would you be up for that?"

Take time to text.

Leader close in prayer
(once everyone who would like to, has had a chance text).

Please Note: Any of us who make a decision to follow Jesus through the call to faith may additionally respond with a desire to be baptized. If so, please pause and consider waiting to be baptized until your family or the faith community you are a part of can be present with you.



SCAN THIS CODE AND FILL OUT THE SHORT SURVEY BEFORE THE WCC SESSION.