



# THE EXHORTER

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***“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40***

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. ([prchurchofchrist.org](http://prchurchofchrist.org))

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***Acts 8:30 "And when Philip had run up, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, 'Do you understand what you are reading?'"***

Our verse today begins the conversation between the preacher Philip and the Ethiopian. It is remarkable how many times God allows you and I to sit in on conversations in the Bible. It's as if we were right there. We learn. We see how to say things. We learn how to bring things up. We learn what to say and what not to say.

This conversation was by divine arrangement. God had brought these two together. This shows that God's intended avenue of conversion was through the teaching of the Bible. Philip was doing remarkable work in Samaria. One might have thought that God would have left Philip there. You know the saying, "If it's not broken, don't fix it." It was working in Samaria. Yet, God pulled Philip away from that area to have this conversation with the Ethiopian. Couldn't have God just saved the Ethiopian without any one else being there? Modern theology says yes. Biblical theology says NO. The Gospel is the power unto salvation. The platform and bridge to Jesus is the preached word of God. God sent Philip to be that bridge.

As Philip catches up with this chariot, he hears the Ethiopian reading. He must have been reading aloud. He must have had his own copy of Isaiah, which was rare, expensive and I doubt that Philip even had his own copy. A simply question was asked. "Do you understand what you are reading?" The Ethiopian knew he needed help. It was fuzzy in his mind. Just who is the prophet talking about, he wondered. And, beginning there, Philip preached Jesus. The dots were connected. Salvation was brought up. Baptism was discussed. The chariot, which had been rolling down the road, was ordered to stop. The two men got out and went down into some water and the preacher baptized the Ethiopian. There was no need to stop the chariot if one is saved without baptism. There is little need for both to get out of the chariot if only a cup full of water, poured over the head was all that was necessary. But that didn't happen. They both got out. They both went into the water. The Ethiopian was immersed, which is what the word baptism means in it's purest form.

I like that question that Philip asked, "Do you understand..." There are some thoughts we need to pull from this.

First, not everyone understands nor has everyone experienced what you have. Some folks have never been part of a congregation that has appointed shepherds. This is a highlight of a church. Share some thoughts about this. Some folks have never had to sit down with a funeral director and work out the details for a funeral. There are so many caskets, vaults, cemeteries. How many death certificates are needed? Share some thoughts about this. Some folks have never had to greet hundreds of people that come through a visitation at a funeral home.

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Lots of things are asked. Curiosity can get the best of some of us. We can pry into things that are none of our business. How do you handle such things? How do you be polite but not rude? Share your insights. Some have never had a child go away to college. What are some things to consider? Some have never planned a wedding? Share some thoughts.

Second, from the standpoint of the Ethiopian, he was humble and honest to admit that he didn't know. Many of us wouldn't do that. Pride wouldn't allow us to do that. We'd guess. We'd fake it. We hate to ask for help, or worse, to admit that we simply do not know.

I think about this from the standpoint of a visitor to Sunday worship. They may not know what happens and why those things are happening, such as songs, prayers and preaching. They may not know where certain books of the Bible are. They may not understand many things. Share your insights and help them feel comfortable by being a friend to them. Help them, if they will allow you, to find where passages are in the Bible. Don't lose your patience nor be critical. They simply do not know.

Third, without Philip, the Ethiopian may have drawn the wrong conclusions about the passage. He may have never really known. Truth tends to be narrow and exclusive. There was one answer about who Isaiah was talking about. Getting this wrong, did matter. What you tell others and how you tell others may make all the difference in the world.

Fourth, because we can help explain a passage or help someone through a difficult time does not mean that we will never need help ourselves. This is important for us preachers to remember. It is assumed that we know everything about the Bible, church history and why society does what it does. And, truth be told, we don't, we don't, we don't. Because you have helped someone with a passage does not mean down the road that you will be sitting where the Ethiopian sits and you will have your own questions. I do. There are some things I just haven't figured out yet. I ask others. I read a lot. I think about these things. Pride can make us believe that we are beyond asking others for help. That's a sad place to be, because it's not true.

Finally, God sent help to the Ethiopian. It makes us think of the passage, "Seek and ye shall find." He was certainly seeking. How he found things was not in a dream, a vision or God speaking in his ear. God sent a preacher. Philip wasn't a priest like the Ethiopian would have just seen in Jerusalem. However, the Ethiopian didn't dismiss him. There is no indication that these two had ever met before. However, when honest and good hearts intersect with open Bibles, good things happen. Maybe you've needed some help. Maybe you've prayed over and over for help. Maybe you've become discouraged and weary because it seems that God isn't helping you. Look around. There may be a Philip running beside your chariot and you never paid any attention to him. Maybe that's the way God will answer your prayer. Someone to encourage you. Someone to be there for you. Someone to correct you. Someone to remind you. Someone to guide you and teach you. We want help and often that help is sitting right there in the pews all around us.

How different this story would have turned had the question been asked, "Do you understand," and the answer in return being, "Yeah, I got it." All of this illustrates that we need each other. There are days we need to be honest like the Ethiopian and ask for help. Let others know that you are slipping. Let others know that you are not getting it. Don't wait until your boat is going over the waterfall before you reach out for help. There is no shame in asking for help. But, then there are days that we must run along side of Philip. Someone needs help and we are just the one to help out. Philip could have stayed in Samaria and said to God, "Send someone else." Or, "It's not my responsibility." But it was his responsibility. And, he could help. And, he went. He even ran. Can you help someone? Do it.

There was a question and there was an answer.

Roger Shouse (used by permission)

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