



Acts 8:26-40
I Once Was Lost
“Seeking After God”

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Have you ever been at a place in life where you were ready to make a change? Like a big change—going in a new direction kind of change. A little less than two years ago, the Seahawks were at that kind of moment. They made the emotionally difficult decision to move on from head coach Pete Carroll. Then they began an intentional search process that ultimately led them to hire Mike MacDonald. In many ways, it was an intentional seeking of a new identity on the football field.

And unless you’ve been living under a rock, you know that last Sunday the Seahawks punched their ticket to the Super Bowl next week. The catalyst for their success was not accidental. It came from top leadership—starting with owner (technically she’s not the owner, I realize), Jody Allen—intentionally seeking something different than what they had been doing. They weren’t just open to change as we talked about last week; they actively wanted it, because the status quo wasn’t working. A change was intentionally sought out.

This morning we continue looking at the thresholds, or stages, people often move through on the journey from non-believer to disciple of Jesus. **Today is all about intentionally seeking God.** The framework for this series comes from the book *I Once Was Lost*, which draws on research with a couple thousand people who moved from non-believer to believer and identifies common stages—or “thresholds”—people tend to experience as they come to faith.

This doesn’t mean everyone’s journey is the same, like a cookie-cutter, or that everyone even goes through all of these phases. And no one consciously says, “I’m now moving from threshold three to threshold four on my journey toward Jesus.” Rather, this framework gives language to patterns that many people experience in moving from *not* believing in Jesus to *becoming* his disciple.

Understanding which threshold the people in our lives are in matters, because it gives us wisdom in how we relate to them and share Jesus with them: what we say or don't say, what we do, and so forth. Let me briefly recap where we've been:

The first threshold is building trust with a Christian. People usually need to see faith lived out well by someone they trust. We can build trust in simple ways: showing up, helping out, and being present.

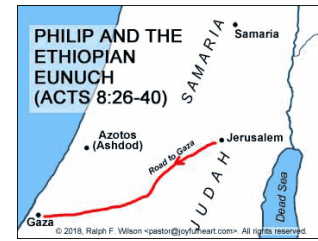
The second threshold is developing curiosity about Jesus. This was “the Curious George sermon.” Curiosity about Jesus grows in others when we Christians live our faith in ways that are genuine, compelling, and noticeable; and when we are genuinely curious about other people.

The third threshold is “opening up to change.” This is what we looked at last week. This begins to happen when someone realizes that their approach to life doesn't really “work” as they hoped. Life is lacking meaning or purpose, or people start thinking more deeply and intentionally about what might be on the other side of the grave and if their current worldview can stand up to that. As those questions grow: their beliefs, values, and even identity start to feel less certain. An openness to change begins to take root, though it's a difficult stage to move through because change is always hard, even when it's for the best.

The fourth threshold is “seeking after God.” This is when someone moves beyond being *open* to change, and begins to actively *pursue* it. They start intentionally looking for biblical answers to their questions. They are investigating if Jesus truly offers the answers they need.

Our text today is Acts 8:26-40. This is a fascinating passage that might raise a number of questions for us, and I hope to address those in addition to highlighting this theme of “seeking after God.” So, let's turn to **Acts 8, starting with verses 26-29.**

So, in these first four verses we are introduced to Philip and this Ethiopian eunuch. They meet somewhere along the road (**picture**) between Jerusalem and Gaza. Philip is a follower of Jesus, though he's not the same Philip who was one of the 12 disciples. *This* Philip we meet in Acts 6, where he is one of seven people appointed to help care for widows in the early church. From Acts 6, we know that he was a Greek-speaking convert to Judaism, who later became a Christian, and lived in or near Jerusalem.



The Ethiopian eunuch, whose name we never get, was in charge of the treasury for the Ethiopian queen. A eunuch is a man who has been castrated for the purpose of trusted service in a royal household. That's all I can stand to say about that without getting a little queasy. 🤔 What matters here is his status. He's in a high-ranking position that would have involved a fair amount of travel and interaction with foreign officials. Because Greek was the dominant language of the Roman world—which extended nearly to Ethiopia, into North Africa—it's safe to presume he would have known Greek fluently, much like Philip.

We also learn that he had converted to Judaism. Verse 27 tells us he had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and was reading the book of Isaiah on his way home. So, this is a man who is genuinely seeking God. Let's keep reading, picking up in **verse 30...**

We see here that **God is clearly at work.** As we saw earlier, God was somehow directing Philip to the eunuch. Exactly how that looked, sounded, or felt to him, we don't know. But verse 26 says an angel directed him, and then a bit later verse 29 says the Spirit directed him. God got through to Philip in some way, and he was open and responsive to God's leading.

At the same time, God had stirred in the eunuch's heart to read Isaiah—specifically, Isaiah 53, one of the clearest prophetic chapters in the entirety of the Old Testament pointing to Jesus. He's reading Isaiah 53:7-8, but he doesn't understand its meaning. When he tells Philip, "How can I understand

unless someone explains it to me?” it’s not that he can’t read the words on the page. For instance, based on the Isaiah quote we read here, we can tell that this is the Greek translation of Isaiah that was part of the Greek translation of the whole Jewish Bible, what we call the Old Testament. That translation was the first translation ever of the Old Testament, and it’s usually called the Septuagint.

We can tell that’s what he’s reading, and not the original Hebrew, because the verses reflect the Greek translation which is a bit different in its specific wording than the Hebrew (our Old Testaments are translated from the Hebrew). Also, Hebrew texts were not as common, and kept in their religious buildings; The Greek translation was common, and much easier for individuals to get a copy of. The point is, “literacy” is not the issue for him. He can read the words on the page, as his question about whether Isaiah is speaking of himself or someone else also indicates. “Understanding” is the issue. He wants to understand what it means.

The word for “explain” is the root “hodgeo” (verse 31) and it means “unless someone guides me” or “to lead along a road.” So, he’s asking Philip to lead him along a path to understand this passage, which gives Philip the opportunity to lead him toward Jesus. We talk here at Rose Hill about leading people toward Jesus, and we talk about being on a path of discipleship. That’s exactly what this word is conveying. The Eunuch wants someone to lead him in his seeking of God.

Philip then explains to him that the passage he is reading is talking about Jesus. He would have talked to him about Jesus’ death and its fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrificial system. He would have talked about Jesus’ resurrection, which confirms Jesus’ identity and the hope of eternal life. He is the Messiah that the Scriptures had been pointing to all along. So, God’s sovereignty is all over this passage. Let’s finish out with the **last few verses (36-40).**

As part of his explanation about Jesus, **Philip must have talked about baptism, because when they come across some water, the Eunuch asks to**

be baptized. As Pastor Kristin shared a few weeks ago, baptism is a sign of God's work in a person's life and their inclusion in the family of God through faith in Jesus. So, this guy wants to be a follower of Jesus and be baptized to mark it. Notice how simple this moment is. There's no committee vote. No theological exam. Just a simple belief that Jesus matters and he's ready to take this step of faith and be baptized as a sign of it.

And it all began because he was intentionally and genuinely seeking God. He wasn't just curious about spirituality in a vague sense or a philosophical kind of way. He was literally reading Scripture, genuinely interested in knowing God. And Biblically speaking, seeking God is always moving us toward Jesus—crucified and resurrected.

So, if that's where you are today—if you're intentionally seeking God—then keep going. Perhaps you've reached the point like the Seahawks a couple years ago, where you've realized that what you've built your life around isn't maybe quite working. You're not just open to change, but you're actively looking for it.

Keep seeking by turning to the Bible. Read it, study it, listen to sermons based on it, discuss it with Christians who take it seriously. Listen to and sing music rooted in Scripture. Try serving with people who follow Jesus. All of these practices will help you find truth and discern who Jesus is.

For those of us who already follow Jesus, our role is to be like Philip—to lead others along the path toward Jesus. When someone is seeking God, it's natural to come alongside them. There's no coercion, no pressure, no awkward and unasked for gospel presentations during half-time at a super bowl party. Philip's leading is natural, because the Eunuch was seeking God.

Verse 35 says that Philip told him about the "good news." The gospel. He stuck to the basics: Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. That *is* the good news. And his approach is worth noting. You don't need a seminary degree to talk about the basics of Jesus. My guess is just about everyone in this room can give a synopsis of the gospel, the good news about Jesus.

Let me close with a quick preview of next week. Next week's threshold is "Entering the Kingdom." While we also see it in today's passage, it will be our focus next week. If you have a friend or loved one who has been seeking God and seems ready for a new start but needs an invitation and encouragement to do so: next Sunday will be a great week to bring them to church. Because ultimately, our hope is that seeking leads to trusting Jesus and entering the Kingdom of God, and that's what we'll talk about next week.

Until then, let's keep intentionally seeking God, wherever we are on the road. Like the eunuch, we may need someone to help us along and understand. And like Philip, we can be ready to help lead others along the path with us. Let's be open to God prompting us to do exactly that. Let's pray...Amen.