



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

## SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Unfinished

Part 14: When God Throws a Curveball

Acts 8:1-8; 26-40 | Tim Badal | December 10, 2017



Luke is writing this book called Acts to record the history of the early church. These were the years after Jesus' earthly ministry; after His death, burial, resurrection and ascension into heaven. We might ask what people did after Christ was no longer with them. We learn that they've been fulfilling the commands and commission Jesus had given them before He left. He had told them, "I want you to be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world."

So far they could say, "Jerusalem—check." Tens of thousands of people had come to know Jesus. In the countryside in Judea, they had seen large numbers of disciples commit their lives to Jesus. So that could be checked off the list as well. But then they still had Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world yet to reach.

Overall the church had experienced a great deal of peace and productivity in ministry—until the passage we looked at last week. Stephen, a disciple of Christ but not one of the original apostles, was out preaching and teaching in Jerusalem when people began to dislike what they were hearing from him. As Stephen continued to preach the message of Christ boldly, the religious establishment said, "We don't want to hear anything more."

They became so angry they picked up rocks and stoned him, until eventually Stephen died. As a result, the church no longer was secure in Jerusalem. No longer did others respect the people of Christ and the way of Christianity. Now the church became Public Enemy #1.

I'm titling this message, "When God Throws a Curveball." What are you going to do when you're surprised by what God calls you into? We'll see how the early church responded to a couple curveballs that came their way. And because we too will experience curveballs, how are we to respond when our comfort zones are removed? Let's read our passage, beginning in Acts 8, which picks up immediately after the stoning of Stephen:

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. <sup>2</sup> Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. <sup>3</sup> But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

<sup>4</sup> Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. <sup>5</sup> Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. <sup>6</sup> And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. <sup>7</sup> For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. <sup>8</sup> So there was much joy in that city.

We're now going to fast-forward to Acts 8:26 to continue the story of Philip:

<sup>26</sup> Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. <sup>27</sup> And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship <sup>28</sup> and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

We'll pick up this story in a few minutes.

In the summer of 1967, Hollywood threw the United States a curveball. The question at hand was this, "What was the Supreme Court going to do in a case that had the country mesmerized. It had only been four years since Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., announced from the steps of the Abraham Lincoln memorial that he had a dream. But in 1967, the question before the Supreme

Court was: is it lawful for a black man to marry a white woman? Is it lawful for a white man to marry a black woman? The issue was interracial marriage.

That's really foreign to some of us today. Of course they should be able to marry. But in that day, 17 states in our country still said it was unlawful for that type of union to take place—and Hollywood wanted to speak to that question. Hollywood wanted to prove to the world that interracial marriages were lawful and right.

So in the summer of 1967, what became one of the leading movies of the day portrayed what it was like to be thrown a curveball. Many of you remember the movie, "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn played the role of two socialite progressives in San Francisco. They had a beautiful blond daughter who had just gone on a trip to Hawaii.

When the daughter returned, she told her parents that she had great news: "I've had the time of my life—and I can't wait to tell you what's happened." Little did they know that their lives were going to be jolted. Remember, these were liberal-leaning, progressive-thinking, anything-goes parents. They lauded themselves on being okay with things the rest of the world disapproved of.

But all that changed when they met the man their daughter met in Hawaii. Although it would have been a whirlwind romance anyway, the greater shock came when Sidney Poitier walked through the door. The daughter then introduced her doctor friend—not only as a friend, or even as just a boyfriend, but as her fiancé.

For several moments, these progressive, open-minded people had to deal with a very real challenge. They had within themselves dormant racism and prejudice, which they had never before admitted. Rather, they had been given awards for their forward-thinking ways. But now, standing before them, was a gentleman who was going to rock every thought they had about their own inner bigotry.

The producers of the movie made Sidney Poitier's character to be a man who was great in every way. He was good-looking and intelligent. He was a doctor who had written all kinds of incredible books that helped people all over the world. He was a pure man. When the mom asked the daughter if there had been any funny business between them, she said, "No. And it's not because of me. He's the one who insists we stay pure until marriage."

During the first part of the movie, the man is rejected simply because of his skin color. What Hollywood was telling America was that we needed to move past racism. And what we're told in that movie is that when you are thrown a curveball—when something happens you weren't expecting—the real you comes out. You don't have time to figure out how to portray something you're not. The real you, your real feelings and emotions, comes out. In the movie, the parents revealed the truth that they didn't like black people and they didn't want to share their holidays and their grandchildren with a black man.

In 1967, the Supreme Court voted to knock down the law preventing interracial marriages and scholars now credit that one movie as the key that turned our culture around.

Now, remakes don't usually do as well as the original movies, but I'm here to tell you: I've seen both movies, and the 2005 remake with Bernie Mac and Ashton Kutcher does a pretty good job. Except this time they turned the tables. Instead of it being a white family having to accept a black individual into their family, the producers of "Guess Who" in 2005 switch to a well-to-do black family who is shocked to find out their daughter is marrying a white man. Even in 2005, they had to deal with the racism and bigotry that happened on both sides.

When someone is thrown a curveball—and in both of these scenarios they highlight the dad—the real person comes out. No longer can there be faking. And that is true for us in our lives. When we are shocked by a story, or when we find ourselves in a position we didn't expect, or when we are taken out of our comfort zone by God Himself, the real us comes out. Are we going to complain? Are we going to grumble, or are we going to praise God?

You see, the early church had a line in the sand. For some time they had been enjoying the blessing of being God's people. They enjoyed the fellowship they were experiencing within the church. But also people outside the church respected them, even were in awe of what was taking place. But all that changed after Stephen's death. On that day we're told that great persecution broke out in Jerusalem. Gone were the days when people acknowledged the good the church was doing, and instead the church became Public Enemy #1. The question they then faced was how to respond, now that God had thrown them a curveball. Were they going to remain committed to the cause of Christ, or were they going to take their things and head home?

Today we're going to see that Philip, and the church as it had been scattered, remained true to Christ. But we have to ask ourselves, if we are thrown a curveball from God, will we respond faithfully as well.

I'm going to give you three points today and I'll warn you that the first one will be really long, the second point really short and the third point really, really short. We'll hit an altitude of 30,000 feet, then I'll bring this thing to a crashing halt. So buckle your seatbelts and we'll see what God is going to do.

## **God's curveballs are usually full of surprises.**

When God throws you a curveball, usually it means your life will be full of surprises. I can't imagine the early church saw persecution coming on the horizon. I don't think Stephen got up that morning thinking that was the day he would die. But after his death, *"there arose on that day a great persecution against the church"* (8:1).

As soon as we hear the word "persecution," we apply it to our own lives. We think, "Well, yeah, I've been persecuted." But the persecution in the early church was a lot more than being made the butt of a joke because of our religious convictions. It was more than simply not being able to sit at the popular kids' table in the high school cafeteria. It was more than being called a kook or a Bible-thumper or names like that.

## **Sometimes we are surprised about where we are called to serve.**

In Acts 8:3 we see what the early church actually faced. After devout men made great lamentation over Stephen, they buried his body. Then the same Saul who had witnessed Stephen's death began *"ravaging the church."* The word "ravaging" in the Greek literally describes a wild animal ripping apart the flesh of its prey. In the same way, Saul began tearing apart the lives of the believers. *"Entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison."*

In other words, if Saul came to your house, he didn't knock on the door. He broke the door down and grabbed you because of one reality in your life: you had been identified as a Christian. Then he would drag you off and put you into prison. In the first century, imprisonment meant losing your job and income; your possessions were probably taken and you probably lost all standing in the community. In that day, no one told you how long you would be in prison. You could easily be left there until you died. None of that is happening to us in our country today.

This was true persecution—and none of them saw this coming. It was God's curveball. When this sort of surprise comes, we naturally ask, "Why am I suffering?" This was a church that had been serving in so many ways. They had seen thousands come to know Jesus. They had boldly proclaimed the gospel. They had witnessed numerous healings and deliverances. This was a church that cared diligently for their community, who had even sold their possessions to give to those in need. It was a church that made sure their widows were cared for and showed unconditional love to one another. In other words, the church was doing Christianity exactly right. They were obediently following God—and in the face of that, God saw fit to bring trouble and turmoil into their lives. Why? What good could come from Christ-followers experiencing this kind of suffering?

I have no answer for the question, "Why?" I don't know. In fact, this week I was renewed in my questioning of God. Many of you know our missionaries from New Guinea, Ben and Missy Hatton. My connection with them goes back to my college days, through a man who had been a friend of some missionaries here in the Fox Valley area.

This man's name was Beazle Sagavo from New Guinea. He had an opportunity to travel to America where he spent a couple years at Aurora Christian School. After that, Judson College allowed him to get a college education. During that time he lived with my parents and our family. He was a wonderful friend and he even worked with me in my catering business.

Some years ago he got married and made his way back to New Guinea, where he became a community leader. He was a godly follower of Jesus Christ. He had four beautiful children. Just the other day I received the news that my friend and brother had a massive heart attack while he was playing soccer and is now dead.

That's when my why questions came: "You've got to be kidding, God! He's got a family. He's serving You. He loves You. There was not a nicer person in the world than Beazle Sagavo. He loved You. He loved people." What do you tell his wife? What do you tell his kids? What do you tell his friends? I don't know why we suffer.

But here's what I do know: Jesus tells us that in this world we will have trouble (John 16:33). Some of us have somehow interpreted that verse to mean that in this world we will have an ever-growing level of comfort. We think this life is going to be easy. We think this life is going to be great. And we do so by throwing Jesus' words to the ground, saying, "I deserve comfort." But Jesus says, "No. You're going to experience trouble."

Why does God allow His children—His church—to experience persecution, pain and sorrow? Here's the reason: Quite frankly, God isn't as interested in your comfort as He is your Christ-likeness. He wanted to grow His church, to deepen and mature His church.

He wanted to make the church more like His Son. For this reason, He allowed persecution to come, so His people would have to bear that persecution and sorrow, learning what it means to rejoice in suffering. So God allowed this wolf named Saul to try to destroy the church. But as much as Saul tried, instead of destroying the church, he only deepened their resolve.

Yes, we're often surprised when we have to suffer. Some of us are suffering today. We're struggling with various issues, asking God, "Why?" But I would encourage you to let go of your comfort and hold tight to Christ-likeness. God wants to build your character and your commitment. He wants to grow your courage. Let go of comfort and grab hold of the things Christ wants you to hang on to.

### **Sometimes we are surprised about whom we are called to serve.**

Not only did God call the church to suffer under great persecution, there was also a change in whom they would be serving. Up to this point they had been serving their own people—their families and communities, the Jewish people. But then in Acts 8:4 we read, *"Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word."* Driven out of Jerusalem, the people continued to spread the gospel. What a novel thing. Instead of giving up—instead of taking down the tent and calling it the end of the show—they kept going. They were simply relocated.

Notice where they go: *"Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ."* You might say, "Samaria. That sounds like a nice place. That's like going from Sugar Grove to Yorkville. That doesn't sound too bad. Both have Culver's. Both have Aldi. I mean, Sugar Grove could use a movie theater here. We've got McDonald's. We've got a lot of the same stuff. They're good people, right?"

But Samaria was a place that Jewish people hated. It was the "other side of the tracks." It was common in Jewish houses for the father to pray, "Lord, thank You for not making us a Samaritan family." Samaria was where the mixed-breeds lived. Their lineage combined Jews with Assyrians or Babylonians. During the days of Ezra, Daniel and Nehemiah, when the Israelites were in captivity, quite a few Jewish people intermarried with their Babylonian and Assyrian captors. So for a Jewish family, the worst kind of "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner" would be to have an Assyrian or Babylonian show up to take your daughter as a bride. But because the Jews were so opposed to interracial marriage, the Samaritans were not allowed in the Jewish places of worship. Most of the Samaritans were actually God-fearing people. They loved Jehovah and looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. If you remember the story of the Samaritan woman in John 4, you'll remember how very surprised she was that Jesus would speak to her. She was amazed that He even let her draw some water for Him at that well.

When the subject of worship came up, she told Him the Samaritans worshipped on a mountain. This was because the Jews would not allow the Samaritans to set foot in their temple. But now Jesus has called His disciples to Jerusalem, to Judea and to Samaria. I wonder if they first thought that was a joke. Yet now they're realizing they're being sent that way. The early disciples would never have reached out to Samaria unless God had caused the persecution to take place. Up to that point, it was really comfortable for them to stay in Jerusalem. But now God had sent them out to Samaria and He was doing a mighty work there. Many people were coming to Christ. We read in Acts 8:6–8 that many spirits were being cast out of people and many who were paralyzed or lame were being healed. There was much joy because God was blessing them.

But then God called Philip to go even beyond Samaria, to the uttermost parts of the earth. Let's go now to the rest of his story, beginning in Acts 8:26:

<sup>26</sup> Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. <sup>27</sup> And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship <sup>28</sup> and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

Not only is God reaching out to the Samaritans, but now the circle has enlarged to include eastern Africa. Yet there's something even more significant in this event. I've told you before that it's important to take note when Scripture repeats certain phrases. For example, the fact that the man was Ethiopian is important, because it's mentioned twice in the text. But five times we will find that he's described as a eunuch. What is Luke trying to tell us?

If you don't know what a eunuch is, he's a man who has been castrated, probably during early puberty years. This definitely impacted the rest of his life, as he would not be a normal adult male. One writer put it this way:

Imagine you're a child taken from home, taken from your parents, taken to another country. Men would hold you down and operate on you as you lay frozen with fear. You felt the searing pain of castration, then suffered a long and arduous recovery. You grew up, but you never experienced puberty. As other boys matured, you did not change in the same ways. You began your work in the royal court, but deep down you longed to find love and have a family—but you were unable.

The non-eunuchs in the court. they respected your position, but behind your back, you heard them mocking. They envied your elevated status in the palace, but they would jeer you for being less than a man. You felt rejected. You felt alone. You were often sick and grew fragile because you lacked the necessary hormones that men need in their bodies. Therefore your bones grew brittle, and your heart grew bitter.

This man was a eunuch. I want you to know that God calls us to the Samaritans in our lives—those people we view as less than us. He also calls us to the scarred individuals with whom our world is filled. There are people like this man who have been traumatized. Whether at a young age or as an adult, people have not only broken their hearts, but broken their bodies or their spirits. Regardless of how a person has been damaged, through unfair treatment or even abuse, we should be encouraged to realize that God sent Philip on a mission to minister to just one broken man. If you are broken, God sees you in your pain or sorrow. Notice in our text the passage this eunuch was reading:

<sup>32</sup> Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. <sup>33</sup> In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."

I'm speculating, but I think the reason this man was reading this text wasn't because he was randomly reading through the Bible. I think he came upon Isaiah 53:7–8 and found it to be a passage with which he fully resonated. He knew what it was like to be humiliated. He knew what it was like to be treated unjustly. I knew what it was like to have his life taken away from him. So he asked Philip, "Who is this man? I'm hurting like He was."

Our world today is filled with broken, hurting people and our assignment as a church is to find them, care for them, bringing them hope, peace and love. We are called to serve the Samaritans of the world and we are called to serve those who are scarred. This man was hurting and God knew it. God sent someone to preach to him.

Listen, our world is full of surprises and being a Christian doesn't mean God doesn't throw curveballs your way. He did that to the church and He will to us, too. The question is what "real you" will come out when He does?

Philip shows us that we need to be ready and willing, because curveballs demand our faithful service. Who was going to reach this man? Who was going to reach the Samaritans and the scarred individuals around Philip? There are hurting and broken people—Samaritans, and red and yellow, black and white—all around us, each one in need of the gospel. But who is going to go and preach to them?

A lot of us will say, "Not me!" We'll come up with all kinds of excuses. But when God throws us a curveball, that means He thinks we're ready to serve, just as Philip was ready to serve. In verse 26, an angel of the Lord told Philip, "*Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.*" And what was Philip's response? "*And he rose and went.*" Five simple words, but praise the Lord for them. Philip was told to do something—and he did it. What a novel idea!

After all, he could have responded with some good excuses. As we saw in verses one through eight, Philip was having an awesome ministry in Samaria. People were responding to the gospel. People were being healed and delivered. Everybody loved him there. Even the local magician—who was viewed in that region as a god—had professed some level of faith in Christ. There was a revival breaking out. So Philip could have said, "God, are You going to take me from this revival to a dusty desert road where nobody goes?"

Sometimes God wants us to downgrade in our ministry. If we're used to talking in front of thousands, sometimes God will call us down to the one. And remember, God doesn't explain why Philip was to go there. We might be willing to do something as long as God explains what the plan is. But often He doesn't. Without knowing why, Philip was faithful to go where God sent him.

Sometimes we might think we're too busy for another assignment. "There are some Netflix tonight I need to watch. I'm a busy man. I've got video games. I've got hobbies." But Philip goes. He does what God asks him to do.

There are three things that give us reasons to obey God in these curveball situations.

## **God's curveballs demand our faithful service.**

### **Faithful servants must exhibit assurance.**

First, Philip was confident that God knew where he should be serving, whether it was to the Samaritans or to the scarred Ethiopian. But remember what has just preceded this event. He had just watched one of his fellow deacons, Stephen, be cut down. So Philip picked up Stephen's mantle and carried on the work—doing the very same thing that got his close friend killed. Philip knew that the next person he shared the good news with might incite a mob against him as well. He too might be stoned for his faith. But Philip didn't stop. Rather, he was confident that whatever God put in front of him to do, God would be faithful to sustain him in it.

You and I can feel really, really confident—as long as we’re here at church. We might even hold up our hands during worship or say “amen” out loud. But when we go out into the world, we become timid. I guess we have a good reason; after all, our comfort is important. But I think I’m safe when I promise you this: if you are bold for your faith here in the United States, I’ll be seeing you next week. You’re probably not going to die. When was the last time we heard of someone dying because they preached the gospel here? To be sure, you might be laughed at. People might say hurtful things about you. But you’re not going to die.

Philip had a death sentence in front of him. He knew that the next person he shared the gospel with could have killed him. But he had courage, knowing that whether in living or dying, God was His Protector. We need to have that courage as well.

### **Faithful servants must exhibit availability.**

Second, like Philip, we must be available. We must tell God, “I’m willing to go. So what if I’ve got a great ministry going here. So what if I’ve got all these plans and purposes in my life that I thought were important. God, I’ll go to the dusty road where You’re leading me. I won’t delay. I’m going to clear my schedule. I’m open-handed and ready for You to do with me what You will.”

### **Faithful servants must exhibit aptitude.**

The story continues in Acts 8:

<sup>29</sup> And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” <sup>30</sup> So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” <sup>31</sup> And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. <sup>32</sup> Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. <sup>33</sup> In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”

<sup>34</sup> And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” <sup>35</sup> Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

Philip was able to start with the passage in Isaiah and then tell the man the rest of the story. “Let me tell you about Jesus. He’s the Suffering Servant.” You have to know some things if you’re going to share the gospel. If you don’t know how to articulate the gospel message, that could be our fault as your teachers. Sharing the gospel is actually quite simple. We have to communicate that God is holy and that all the world—including ourselves—is sinful. Sinful man cannot be in fellowship with a holy God unless someone stands in the gap and that is what Jesus has done for us. He was God, but He made Himself flesh, taking our sins upon Himself on the cross of Calvary. And because of the blood that was shed there, through faith and repentance we can come to trust Him as our Lord and Savior. If we do this, we will be given eternal life.

Perhaps some of you still want further training, but I would say that if you understand the basics, the training you really need happens when you go out and begin to share God’s truth. Be bold. Pray for courage. Philip had an aptitude to share from the Scriptures what it means to be a Christ-follower; we need to have that as well.

## **God’s curveballs provide us with fantastic situations.**

Our assurance, availability and aptitude can work together to bring us into some fantastic situations.

### **When we follow God’s lead, we get to proclaim the good news.**

Philip was able to give this man the good news—the *euangelion* as it’s called in the Greek—and I think he was excited to do this. “I get to share the good news of Jesus!” We should have that same excitement when we go to work tomorrow, because if nothing else is exciting, sharing the good news of Christ with our co-workers should be. “I get the privilege of sitting in a mindless cubicle, where God has forced all the other people to be able to hear that I love Jesus. I get paid for opportunities to share Jesus with my co-workers.: Or, “I get to learn a few things at school and then tell my friends about Jesus.”

### **When we follow God’s lead, we get to participate in God’s grace.**

We carry in jars of clay a great treasure, the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 4:7. We have a “pearl of great price” (Matthew 13:45–46). As Christ’s ambassadors, we have the privilege of telling people the good news of Jesus Christ, and when we do, we get to participate in God’s grace.

Philip’s story continues in verse 36:

<sup>36</sup> And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” <sup>38</sup> And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. <sup>39</sup> And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away.

Three times in this text we see the word “they.” They got out of the chariot; they went down into the water where Philip baptized the Ethiopian; they came out of that water together. One man is going through this personally, while the other is able to witness it.

Earlier this morning I think I had the greatest highlight I've had in the 15 years I've ministered at this church, when in this pool of water behind me I was able to baptize my oldest son. Here's the crazy thing. I was able to participate in God's grace, because I've watched my son grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Without prompting or begging or demanding on my part, over this past year God has done a work in that young man's life. He came to us and said, “I want to be baptized.” In fact, this morning we all got to participate in baptisms, seeing people's lives changed, and that should ignite our hearts. We're part of something exciting that God is doing.

That's why God calls us to evangelism. It's not just to take us out of our comfort zones, but to allow us to know the great joy that comes when we see people come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Studies tell us that the majority of Christians will never in their lifetime lead someone to the Lord.

Can I tell you something? I'm not going to guilt you in any way, but I will tell you that you are missing out. What an opportunity it is to as one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. Oh, the joy that fills your heart— leading someone to the Lord will rock your world. Participate in God's grace. Is it scary? Yes. Is it awkward? Yes. Do you make mistakes? I do all the time! But it's an awesome thrill to be part of it.

### **When we follow God's lead, we get a preview of glory.**

Almost every week recently there's been part of the Scripture I simply don't know what to do with. I don't know what happened next in Philip's story. He shared the good news with this Ethiopian and baptized him—then all of a sudden he was gone. I don't know if Luke is saying Philip ran out of that water really fast and was never to be seen again. A lot of people believe he was somehow teleported from this place to Azotus. Why would God do that? I have no idea. Why He doesn't do that for us? I have no idea. I have been on the Eisenhower Expressway and have wished I could be teleported lots of times.

But here's what I can tell you. If that is truly the case for Philip, then God was giving a preview of the blessed hope for all believers, which is that in a twinkling of an eye we will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:52). We're never told that Philip and this Ethiopian eunuch ever met again—here on earth, that is. But we can be assured they will see each other in glory. In fact, they're in heaven right now, sharing in God's glory and mercy in a place where there is no sin.

Without being teleported, how do we experience the glory of God? We may lead people to the Lord and never really know what that means. I don't know that the Sunday school teacher in my childhood church knows the impact she had on my life. Well, she may know now that she's in heaven, but in this life she never could have known how important her witness was in my life. There are others who may not know what they've done—but now, in glory, they see it. And one day we will stand in glory and we will meet people for whom we had a significant part in their lives. When we share the good news of Christ, we preview what's going to take place in glory. So God's throwing you some curveballs? He wants you to be Christ-like. He wants you to be available. He wants you to be faithful.

Will the real you rise up, and in commitment and love will you follow Jesus along the way—even if it means going to people you didn't think you were called to? Or will you cower in fear, saying, “You know what? It's too hard.” I pray that we will follow in the footsteps of Philip and obey the calling the gospel has on our lives, not because we have to, but because we get to.