



## READ ACTS 8:26-39

God sent Philip to walk down the road between Jerusalem and Gaza. There Philip saw an Ethiopian eunuch who was riding in a chariot and reading the prophet Isaiah. Philip felt moved to run alongside the chariot and ask the Ethiopian man if he understood what he was reading.

“How can I, without some help?” responded the Ethiopian man, inviting Philip into his chariot so they could discuss the passage. As they continued down the road, they came to a stream. The man asked Philip if there was any reason he couldn’t be baptized. Philip baptized him right there, and then the Spirit of God took Philip away. The Ethiopian man, happy to be baptized, continued on his way.

## BUILDING THE CHURCH: WHO’S IN?

To modern ears, this story is just plain weird. But when you look deeper you might discover that it’s surprisingly profound and relevant. When this story was written, the early Church assumed that only Jews could be followers of Jesus. He was, after all, the Jewish Messiah.

And because the Ethiopian man was a eunuch, he wasn’t allowed to be a Jew or worship in the temple. He was an outsider. So it seems strange that God would send Philip (a Jew, an insider) to talk to him in the first place. And yet there is Philip, sprinting down a hot desert road, robe flapping in the wind, chasing this chariot.

We are now living the resurrection. Jesus has risen and we are left to figure out what to do about it. What does it mean to be resurrection people? How do we build the church? Is it for the whole community, regardless of who they are, what they believe, and where they come from? If so, how are we making that known? How are we living that out? Why is an honest conversation about these questions necessary and important? Who’s in?

NEXT WEEK: Acts 15:1-18



## RELATIONSHIP

DAY 1: What would you do if you were Philip, watching this chariot go by in the desert? Would you chase it? Are there “chariots” that need to be chased today? What does that mean? Is this a call to evangelism, or something else? What is the difference?



## WONDER

DAY 2: What does it sound like when God calls us to chase chariots today? How do we hear God’s voice?



## SURPRISE

DAY 3: On the surface, do these two men have anything in common? When you dig below the surface, do they have anything in common? Do you think it takes courage to strike up a conversation like this? Is it worth it? Watch the latest Heineken commercial (search “Heineken Worlds Apart” on youtube). What do you think? Even if the ad feels contrived, does it reveal any truth? What is it? Is it a truth you subscribe to in your life, and in your church? How do you live it out? Does that truth require action?



## PROGRESS

DAY 4: Do you think there’s any reason why this Ethiopian man can’t be baptized? Does Philip? Why doesn’t Philip point to his race, his lack of training, his theology, or his general outsider status as reasons not to baptize him? Has the church in general followed Philip’s lead over the last 2,000 years? What would keep the church from doing welcoming people as freely as Philip did?



## SURPRISE

DAY 5: Is your faith community like Philip, welcoming everyone with open arms despite the details that might stand in our way? Do we ever fail to be like Philip? Do we let details get in the way? Which ones? Why are the details in your answer at stake?



## RELATIONSHIP

DAY 6: How will we hear and respond to the Spirit’s call to chase the chariot? For example, how will we engage with the restless child sitting near us in worship? How will we engage the Somali man in line behind us in the grocery store? How will we engage the senior who lives in isolation? How will we engage with the one who begs at the side of the road? How will we engage with the person who walks into our sanctuary for the first time and sits alone? Will we ignore them, or will we chase the chariot? And what does that look like today?



## PROGRESS

DAY 7: What does this strange story have to teach us about our common humanity? Is this story as relevant today as it was when it was written? In what way?