

Every morning I ask God to help me love him with all that I am and all that I have, lead me by his Spirit, and glorify his holy name through me. However, as a pastor/clergy type, I am fully aware that Christianity is a lay movement, the most effective one in history i.e., God using non-clergy types to do great things for him. Therefore, I pray these things not only for myself but for you as well. No pressure, but if heaven is going to get to earth as Jesus prayed for and expected in the “Disciples Model Prayer” then it’s going to happen bigger, better, and faster through you more so than me. I absolutely believe this because dedicated Christ followers are the intersect between heaven and earth and my job is to help you see it, believe it, and function between these two realities.

Philip

One of the most prolific lay people in the Book of Acts was Philip, of whom we spoke about briefly last week. He was one of the seven elected by the congregation to oversee church logistics and administration. He was also the first to take Christ to Samaria. When he did, all heaven broke out and many people were saved, healed, and delivered from oppressive demons. Acts 8 details two of his outreaches so as we continue our Supernatural Church series today, we will see how important every one of you are to the mission and movement of God.

Simon, the Samaritan Sorcerer [Acts 8:9-24]

God’s mighty work through Philip caught the attention of a Samaritan Sorcerer named Simon. He had a city-wide reputation as a master of the dark arts. So mesmerized were the people with his magic they entitled him, “Great Power” and conferred on him deity-like status (v10). However, when the Samaritan Sorcerer witnessed God’s awesome power displayed through Philip, he thought to himself, “my powers are inconsequential.” “I must get some of his.” Surprisingly, when Philip went all Billy Graham and gave the invitation for the people to believe on Christ, Simon eagerly responded and was also baptized (v13).

Because the ministry was going so well in Samaria, Peter and John catch a red eye from Jerusalem to Samaria to observe for themselves what was going on. Once there, they start praying that these newly minted Christians might receive the Holy Spirit. And they do! We are not told what phenomenon, visible or otherwise, caught Simon’s attention, but he was so impressed by the Spirit’s power he redoubled his efforts to obtain it. With credit card in hand, he asks Peter and John (v19)

**Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands
may receive the Holy Spirit.**

Skipping the pleasantries, Peter responds:

**May your money perish with you,
because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money!**

They say, “everyone has a price,” and that may be true if we exclude Jesus. In John 3:34 he told Nicodemus that he would give the gift of the Holy Spirit to anyone that asks, without measure or cost. So, now we know there are three things that are free in life: (1) Our names, 2) God’s grace, and 3) God’s Spirit. And, most certainly, that the very best things in life are free! As a newbie Christian however, Simon doesn’t know how to connect the theological dots. He spent his whole life paying for

magic spells, formulas, and incantations. Why then is Peter so rash with him? V21-23 explains

21...Because your heart is not right before God. 22 Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. 23 For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

This is messy, but it does remind us that when we come to Christ, as the old hymn encourages, i.e., "Just as we are" we are not immediately made perfect or Christlike. Simon believed in Jesus Christ so that he might experience a greater prestige and power than he enjoyed during his occultic career. Although Peter gets right to the heart of the matter by saying Simon's "heart wasn't right before God" there's still hope for him should he ask God for forgiveness. Thus, he begs Peter in v24

Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me.

We are not told what happened to Simon afterward. I'm hoping he eventually got his theology and motives right and that we will see him in heaven someday. But whether one truly accepts Christ, it's our job is to pray that they will get their hearts right with him irrespective of what their sins or motives are.

Ethiopian Treasurer (v28-40)

After his work is complete in Samaria, Philip is led by the Spirit to head south on the Jerusalem/Gaza highway. As Mother Teresa was fond of saying, "All interruptions are divine appointments." It just so happens that also traveling in the same direction is the chief executive of financial affairs for Queen Candace. Although an Ethiopian, he converted to Judaism at some point in his life and is returning home in a royal chariot, after completing a worship pilgrimage in Jerusalem (v27). The Spirit instructs Philip to sidle up to the slow-moving vehicle. As he closes in, he hears the Ethiopian reading his daily devotion from Isaiah 53. Today we call this chapter, "The Suffering Servant" but Philip asks the Ethiopian if he understands what's going on with this passage. The treasurer responds, "No!" "Can you help a brother out?" Philip hops into the chariot as the Ethiopian reads (Acts 8:32-33).

32 "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the 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."

With a small hint of exasperation, he asks Philip, "Is Isaiah talking about himself or someone else?" Thank God Philip didn't say, "Hold on while I text my pastor." Or "Just a second while I Google that." Supernatural laypeople know what the Bible says and what it means. Philip explains the passage is about how Jesus suffered for our sins to save us. Candace's treasurer responds,

That deserves another 'wow! What prevents me from publicly declaring my faith in this Jesus through water baptism. There's a small oasis. I'm diving in!

Immediately after he is baptized the Ethiopian is filled with joy, but Philip is "suddenly taken away" by the Spirit to lead city-wide revivals in every town from Azotus to Caesarea (v39-40). Acts 21:8 tells us he eventually settled down in Caesarea where he started a church and raised a family of four daughters, all of whom went into the ministry.

Best Lay Person: Steve

Conclusion:

I believe what lies in the heart of every lay person is a deep desire to serve God. Philip, whom I call, “The most awesome layperson ever,” possessed three qualities you can develop that will enable you to serve God even more than you do now:

- 1) He cultivated a heart for those far from God.**
- 2) He obeyed the Spirit’s promptings to interact with those people (we all have Simons and Ethiopian treasurers in our lives that God wants us to speak with).**
- 3) He knew his Bible. As our culture becomes more de-churched, people have an array of questions that need good, solid answers before they go all in for Jesus. We have the answers so let’s do our best to explain them.**

Work hard to cultivate and practice these qualities and God will use you in ways you never thought possible. Let us pray.