

Rolling with the Eunuch: Seven Principles for Growing in the Gospel

Introduction

The Text

²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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 ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” ³¹ And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² 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. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”

³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ 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?” ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. (Acts 8:26–40)

A Second Perspective

A. This is now our second week dealing with this most amazing text and story.

1. Last time, we considered things more from the perspective of Philip.
 - a. And, as such, we looked at this idea of personal evangelism. So the message was titled “Walking with Philip: Seven Principles for Going with the Gospel.”
2. But now this morning we are ready to consider things more from the perspective of this eunuch.
 - a. And, with this, we’re going to see not so much how we are to go with the gospel, but how we are to grow in it. This eunuch shows us what it looks like to move towards God.
 - i. His example is relevant for both the seekers among us (those who are currently outside the Christian faith but curious about its claims) and those who would already call themselves Christians.

(1) Because at the end of the day, both groups, we could say, are attempting to grow in the gospel. Both want to know God in deeper ways.

(a) Don't you want that?!

B. So, with this in mind, the title of this morning's sermon is: "Rolling with the Eunuch: Seven Principles for Growing in the Gospel." Let me bring these principles out for you now one-by-one . . .

Principle #1: Make the Trip

1500 Miles for Him!

A. I mentioned last time that this eunuch had come an extraordinarily long way to worship there at the temple in Jerusalem.

1. As we're told in [v. 27](#), he was a "court official" for the "queen of the Ethiopians." He was "in charge of all her treasure."

- a. Ancient Ethiopia corresponds really to what is now modern-day Sudan.
- b. And what this means is that the journey this man sets out on, from ancient Ethiopia to Jerusalem, would have likely been some 1500 miles one-way—which by chariot would have taken at least a month or so.

B. And, as I said last time, I think this speaks not just to the reverence this man had for God, but also, and especially, to his desperation.

- 1. There likely was a gaping hole in his life. He had power and prominence and all this, but, as you might expect, it didn't satisfy.
- 2. So when he hears about the God of Israel, YHWH, he's intrigued. He's, perhaps for the first time in a long time, hopeful. "Maybe there, with this God in Jerusalem, is the answer!"
- 3. And so, likely at threat of losing his job . . . he makes the trip.

C. And now here's what I want you to see: Though, to his dismay, no doubt, he comes to find he's not able to enter the assembly there in the temple—because he's a Gentile and a eunuch—nevertheless, it is his willingness to make the trip that puts him in position to be encountered on that road by Philip . . . and by God!

1. He didn't meet YHWH in the way he first anticipated, but, make no mistake, YHWH met him!

5 Miles for Us?

A. And so, taking this man as our example, I just want to ask: how far are we willing to go to know God, to grow in the gospel?

1. The eunuch would travel some 3000 miles in total, spending a couple months out on the road. “Whatever it takes to be a part of the worship service there in Jerusalem!”
 2. How long does it take you to get to church? 5 minutes? 10? Some of us real hardcore Mercy Hill folks, maybe we have to drive for 30-40 minutes.
 - a. But, at the end of the day, it’s nothing in comparison—it’s just a few minutes and a few miles.
- B. And some of us, we have, in heart, what this eunuch has.
1. We may not have to travel as far, but we prioritize it like he does. We long to know God and we want to worship with his people.
- C. But, others of us, it seems to me, even a few minutes and a few miles is too much.
1. We come to worship on Sundays when it’s convenient. We come when we weren’t out too late with friends the night before. We come when it doesn’t conflict with something more important (as if there were such a thing!). . . . We come sporadically if we come at all.
 - a. And so it’s no surprise we’re not growing in the gospel.
- D. I know I’ve come in a bit hot already and the sermon’s just begun, but can I turn up the heat just a little bit more?
1. If you are inconsistent in your attendance at our church’s worship services, if you regularly make excuses instead of making the trip—you are hindering your own spiritual growth and maturation, and you are, in truth, endangering your soul.
 - a. There is no softer way to say it. It is a serious matter.
- E. Now, of course, I’m not talking about missing on occasion. We all have to for various reasons. That’s fine.
1. I’m talking about missing on the regular—where it’s a normal thing to gather with the saints maybe just once or twice a month. That’s a problem.
- F. This is why, for example, the author of Hebrews writes: “²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together [‘not forsaking the assembly’], as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Heb. 10:23–25).
1. How do you hold fast to your confession of hope without wavering?
 2. How do you continue to be stirred up in love and good works?
How do you find encouragement and enablement to endure to the end?

- a. It's by assembling, by coming together with God's people for instruction and worship. It's by "making the trip."
 - i. So he says: "Don't neglect it. Don't forsake it. Get in your chariot, or your car, or on your horse, or your moped, or whatever you have, and get there!"
- G. That's why, of the early church, we read: "⁴² [T]hey devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. . . .⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. . . .⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people" (Acts 2:42, 44, 46–47).
 - 1. They come together and God meets them in that.
- H. That's where this growing in the gospel starts. You just commit to showing up. Whether you're a seeker, still just curious about Christian faith, or you've been a Christian now for many years; whether you've got to go across the street or across the globe . . . you make the trip!
 - 1. The eunuch doesn't encounter God if he doesn't come down that road.

Principle #2: Open the Book

Reading the Prophet Isaiah

- A. Now I know that, for this man, it was likely a scroll he was reading from but you get what I'm saying.
 - 1. It would be great if we all had scrolls we could unroll, wouldn't it? "Please unroll your scrolls with me to the book of Acts chapter 8 . . ."
 - a. It just feels like whatever you're reading from a scroll must be particularly important—like some sort of old school treasure map or something.
 - b. But, sadly, as it is, the Bible in our day, typically comes to us in the form of a book. So . . . "open the book."
- B. But you noticed it, right? This man's made the trip from Ethiopia to Jerusalem. And even though it seems he'd been turned away at the temple door, as it were, he's still not done pursuing God.
 - 1. He has this sense that there's still more to all this and he wants to keep learning about it.
 - 2. So on his way home (and he's got quite a while!) he determines to read: "²⁷ He had come to Jerusalem to worship²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah" (vv. 27-28).
- C. And here's what I love: He's reading it, even though it's clear he doesn't fully understand it.
 - 1. When Philip comes up and asks him if he understands what he's reading, he literally says: "How can I . . .?" (v. 31). In other words: "Of course I don't. This book is confusing!"

- a. “Why are you doing it then?”
- b. “Because I want to get as close to God as I can, and I know that he’s revealed himself here. I don’t always get it—but if I keep coming, if I keep reading, if I keep opening the book, maybe I’ll start to.”

Hope for Us

A. And this gives all of us hope I think because the Bible can be confusing, right? And we don’t always get it either.

1. Listen, I’m a pastor, seminary-trained, and I still get confused all the time.

a. I’ve been in Song of Solomon for my devotions lately (I had put it off for a bit but finally decided it was time to make my way through it). And can I just tell you: I don’t know what’s going on in some of these scenes. I’m not even sure I want to know. That stuff is steamy—it’s enough to make a grown man blush.

i. But I know God is revealing something of himself to me in it, somehow. I know he’s there, because it’s his Word. So I open it and read it, whether I always fully get it or not.

B. So there’s this encouragement here for all of us—whether we’re just checking out Christianity or we’re long-time Christians: open the book.

1. Don’t worry about whether it all makes sense at first.

a. Your time reading the Bible is not always going to be awesome. It’s not always going to be fire—where you’re just struck by the glory of God and you’re on your face weeping and amazed at the grace shown you in Jesus.

b. Sometimes you’re left scratching your head saying: “I don’t get it. How could I get it?”

2. But you put yourself there in the way of God’s presence anyways.

a. And you plead with him along the lines of [Ps. 119:18](#): “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.”

b. You commit to opening the book and, in time, wouldn’t you know it . . . God will open himself to you!

Principle #3: Ask for Help

We All Need Help

A. If you noticed, I pulled up short on the eunuch’s response to Philip’s initial question there in [v. 30](#).

1. Look at [vv. 30-31](#) in full now: “³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ ³¹ And he said, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.”

- a. And I was just struck by that. Because here you have this prominent man—with a lot of power, a lot of money; most of the rooms he'd walk into, he's in charge.
 - b. And yet here he has no problem saying: "I don't get this . . . and I need your help!"
 - i. I think it's a testament to just how bad he wants to know, to just how desperate he really is. He's not afraid or ashamed to ask for help.
- B. I've just begun reading through Ed Welch's book *Side by Side* where he tries to coach us in walking alongside one another in wisdom and love. (I took a few biblical counseling classes from him while at seminary. I know it's going to be good.) But I love what he writes in the opening pages: "We all need help—that's simply part of being human."

The help we need goes beyond things like getting our house painted or finding a good mechanic. It's deeper than that. We need help for our souls, especially when we are going through hardships. Help can be as simple as connecting with someone who understands or with someone who genuinely says, 'I'm so sorry.' We were not designed to go through hard things alone.

But it's not easy to ask for help. We spend a lot of time hiding our neediness because we are afraid of what people will think. [Does that sound like you? I see myself there. But he goes on . . .] Speaking personally, on most days I am happy to give help and reluctant to ask for it. For me, being needy is a sign of weakness, and, given a choice, I prefer to appear strong or at least competent.

Yet weakness—or neediness—is a valuable asset in God's community. Jesus introduced a new era in which weakness is the new strength. Anything that reminds us that we are dependent on God and other people is a good thing. Otherwise, we trick ourselves into thinking that we are self-sufficient, and arrogance is sure to follow. We need help, and God has given us his Spirit and each other to provide it" (11-12).

 - 1. As I read this, I thought of the first beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3).
 - 2. We need help—from God, certainly—but also from other people. On so many levels: physically—sure; spiritually—more than we know, no matter how long we've been walking with Jesus.
- C. This is why we put such a premium here on Home Groups and DNA Groups.
 - 1. These are places you can get real about your faith, about your struggles. These are places you can ask for help.
 - a. Please—if you're not in small group, whether it's a Home Group, a DNA Group, or something else—go online, check them out, fill out an interest form, talk to me afterward. But take it seriously.
- D. The bottom line is this: When you're spiritual life hits a rough patch, when you feel like you're trying to follow Jesus in the dark, when you're in the grip of some sin, or when you're struggling in some relationship, or when, like this Eunuch, you come to a text in Scripture and you have no idea what it means or how to apply it . . .
 - 1. . . . do you have anyone in your life that you can turn to and ask for help?

- a. Because you need that . . . if you want to grow in the gospel.
- E. The way I see it, there are two kinds of people in this room here this morning:
 - 1. Those who need help and humbly and appropriately ask for it.
 - 2. And those who need help but proudly and perilously pretend they don't (for whatever reason).
 - a. Which one are you going to be?

Principle #4: Embrace His Grace

The 99 for the 1

- A. Here's what's so amazing about this story, especially when we consider it in its broader context: God went to all this trouble, Philip went to all this trouble . . . for one guy.
 - 1. You realize, don't you, that this is the first story of personal evangelism and personal conversion given to us in the book of Acts.
 - a. Everywhere else it's been mass revival, mass conversion, preaching in public and many people coming to faith.
 - b. Here it's one man speaking to one man about The God-Man who died to save him. It's so personal.
- B. Did you notice, in the earlier part of [Acts 8](#), Philip is in Samaria, a place where there was mass revival going on, and he was playing a vital part in it all.
 - 1. And then, seemingly out of the blue, God tells Philip to go. "We're going to leave that. We're going to go on this janky old road down to Gaza. It's a desert place. It's no fun. You might not see anyone on the way."
 - a. "Why would I do this? Why would I leave all that's going on here to go there?"
 - i. Why would I leave the 99 here?"
 - ii. "Because I've got 1 out there . . . and I love him."
 - iii. "⁴ What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing" (Luke 15:4–5).
- C. That's the heart of our God. The 1 matters. You matter.
 - 1. I am convinced that, even if you were the only person on earth who needed saving, Jesus still would have come down and gone through with the agony of the cross.

- a. Because you matter that much to him, and you're loved that much by him . . . more than you could ever know.
 - i. I can't convey it with mere words. I try and I try and I try, Sunday after Sunday. But I can't . . .
- D. But I'll tell you the closest we can come to conveying the wonder of this love with mere words is with those words that this eunuch is reading there in [Isa. 53](#). We don't get any clearer a picture of God's heart for us than we get here.
 - 1. This man has [Isa. 53](#) open in his lap. And Luke tells us that at the time Philip approaches he's on [vv. 7-8](#).
 - a. Look at [Acts 8:32-33](#): "³² 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. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.'"
 - b. And [v. 8](#) of [Isa. 53](#) concludes: "[He was] stricken for the transgression of my people."
- E. So the eunuch asks: "Who is this?"
 - 1. And Philip answers: "It's Jesus!
 - a. My friend, I know you've come so far in effort to find God, but, listen, God has come even further still in effort to find you. Jesus set aside his glory to get into the dirt with us.
 - b. The Father struck his only Son for the sins of his wayward people. Jesus gets the judgement you deserved. So you can get the salvation he deserved. '[J]ustice was denied him' so grace could be shown to you.
 - c. 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' ([John 1:29](#)).
 - d. Embrace this grace!"
 - i. And the eunuch does so. He receives it freely by faith.

Beginning and Continuing by Grace

- A. And this is so important for growing in the gospel and maturing as a Christian—embracing grace. It sounds easy, but it's actually quite challenging.
 - 1. We're always trying to earn our salvation, or pay God back, or show why we're worthy, and all this.
 - 2. It's hard enough at the beginning of the Christian life to receive grace, but it seems to me it may be even harder to do so after you've been a Christian for a while.
 - a. You can start to think that you're supposed to move on from the gospel and from God's grace and you're supposed to know better by now and be better.

- b. Maybe the Christian life begins by grace, but then it's carried on by works.
 - i. But that's not it. It's grace through and through.
- B. Paul gets ferocious about this idea in [Gal. 3](#), where it seems the Galatian Christians have come off the tracks of God's grace. He writes: "¹O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. ²Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? . . . ⁵Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith . . . ? (vv. 1-3, 5).
 - 1. It's a rhetorical question. The point is clear: The way you begin the Christian life is also the very way you carry on and grow—namely, by hearing the gospel of God's grace in Jesus and believing it, taking it into your heart, letting it melt and transform you from the inside-out.
- C. It's grace through and through. Embrace it!

Principle #5: Take the Plunge

Immediate Obedience

- A. One of the ways we know the eunuch embraces the offer of this grace here is he shows a remarkable desire to be baptized at once. Look at [vv. 36-38](#): "³⁶And 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?' ³⁸And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him."
- B. From this, we can infer that, as Philip was sharing the "good news about Jesus" (v. 35) with this brother, he must have said something along the lines of what Peter said to that crowd back in [Acts 2](#): "³⁸Repent and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you . . . and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (vv. 38–39).
 - 1. So the eunuch says: "I hear the Lord calling. I know I need forgiveness. There's some water. Let's go!"
 - a. But notice: There's no hesitation. There's no delay. There's no excuse-making. There's no putting off until tomorrow.
 - b. There's just earnest and immediate obedience. He takes the plunge.

"Today, If You Hear His Voice . . ."

- A. And his example here illustrates a very important principle for us so far as the Christian life is concerned—whether you're just coming into the faith or you've been a Christian for quite a while.
 - 1. It's the principle of immediate obedience—or, as I'm calling it here "taking the plunge."

- B. This is what the author of Hebrews is getting at in Heb. 3:13-15: “¹³ [E]xhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. ¹⁵ As it is said, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts’”
- C. Why such an emphasis here on “today”—listening today, responding today, obeying today?
1. Because, for one thing, you may not get tomorrow. You put off making a decision on Jesus today, you may die on the drive home for all you know.
 2. But secondly, he says it there, if God is calling you to himself or calling you to obey in this or that particular matter, but you are choosing to stay in your sin for a bit and you’ll get around to obeying tomorrow, don’t be fooled . . .
 - a. You’re not just staying neutral on the matter.
 - b. You are “**harden[ing] your heart**”—which means the window for an appropriate response is closing.
 - i. When you come back to the idea later it will seem even more unreasonable and undesirable than today.
 - c. If you hear his voice today, act on it, whatever it may be. Because if you plug your ears to it now you may not hear it any longer.
 - i. We are either opening to God or we are closing. We are either softening to him or we are hardening. We don’t get the option of staying neutral.
 - (1) And the thing that determines which way we’re headed is what we do with what he’s asking of us today.
- D. That’s why I say it’s immediate obedience. That’s the principle. That’s how you grow in the gospel. You take the plunge.

Principle #6: Rejoice in God

Swimming in the Sea

- A. Look at where the story goes from here, v. 39: “**And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.**”
1. Now, I could imagine a scenario where this man comes up out of the water, sees that Philip is now somehow gone (however it happened I do not know), and he’s a bit bummed. “Now I’m alone again? I wanted more fellowship, more opportunity to learn from him,” etc.
 2. But he’s not despondent here, is he. He’s rejoicing.

- a. Because, while I said earlier that we all do need help from our brothers and sisters in various ways, what we need most of all at the bottom in an ultimate sense is God. And he has God now. He'll be okay.
 - i. He knows he's loved and cared for and embraced, even when no one else is around. He can be happy, satisfied.
- B. It's as Jonathan Edwards writes: "The enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows; but God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the ocean" (The Works of Jonathan Edwards, 17:437–438).
 - 1. This eunuch is swimming in that sea right now.
- C. And I think we can learn from him.
 - 1. Because, all along the way, we are prone to attach our joy to all sorts of different things, even good things—like our Christian leaders or Christian community.
 - a. But all of these are "downstream" joys. They're not the ocean source.
 - b. They're "scattered beams." They're not the sun.
 - c. They're good. But they're not God!
 - i. It's as Augustine famously wrote in his Confessions: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."
- D. If you want to grow in the gospel, learn to find your joy and satisfaction and rest in God above all else.

Principle #7: Go on Your Way

The 1 for the 99

- A. If you noticed, this man didn't just rejoice. He "went on his way rejoicing" (v. 39).
 - 1. He didn't just sit around in his joy. He was moving with it. He was going somewhere. Where was he going? Back to Ethiopia.
 - 2. And do you want to know what he would do when he gets there? He would share his joy, he would spread the good news, the gospel, with others.
 - a. In fact, Irenaeus, one of the early church fathers, wrote in the second century that this Ethiopian became a missionary among his people (Against Heresies iii.12.8).
- B. So then, as much as God was willing to leave the 99 to go after the 1, in another sense here, we see that he's going after the 1 because he cares about the 99. There are more Ethiopians to reach.

1. The gospel is advancing beyond the boundaries of Israel and Samaria, now to the Gentiles and the ends of the earth!
- C. It's what he'd prophesied many years before:
1. [Ps. 87:4: "Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon; behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush \[another name for what was ancient Ethiopia\]— 'This one was born there \[in Zion\], they say.'" Because of Jesus, the Ethiopians will be welcomed in as full citizens of the kingdom of God!](#)
 2. [Zeph. 3:9-10: " ⁹ For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord. ¹⁰ From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers . . . shall bring my offering."](#) They're going to come to me. They're call upon my name!
 - a. And all of this God sets in motion: by sending Philip, down that desert road, to reach this lone eunuch, en route to Ethiopia!

Your Circle of Influence

- A. And who knows how he may want to do something like this with you?!
1. When God saves you and sweeps you up into the joy of his salvation, he always does it with a view to others.
 - a. There are people in your circle of influence that you can reach with his grace in a way that no one else can.
- B. Sometimes God saves us and he sends us somewhere else.
1. But a lot of times he saves you and he sends you right back to "Ethiopia"—to the same old places filled with the same old people, because they, above anyone else, can see: you're not the same; you've been changed by Jesus. And it's a compelling apologetic for the gospel.
- C. This is what Jesus does with that man from whom he'd cast out a legion of demons in [Mark 5](#). The guy is begging Jesus that he might be able to travel on with him from there, and understandably so.
1. [But, v. 19, " ¹⁹ \[H\]e did not permit him but said to him, 'Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.' ²⁰ And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled" \(vv. 19-20\).](#)
 - a. Because they knew his story. They knew who he once was, and who he is now, because of Jesus.
- D. So we don't just rejoice in God. We go on our way rejoicing . . . and we bring others into that joy as well!