

44-08-02.wpd—The Discipline of Attentiveness
 Lent, guidance, obedience, attentiveness, Holy Spirit, evangelism,
 Acts 8:26-40
 We must bring spiritual alertness to God-arranged opportunities.

INTRODUCTION: (text as Scripture reading)

—*How available are we to be used by God?* Our answer to that question tells about our willingness as disciples. *Will we follow Christ anywhere? Will we go where He sends us?* This is *where the rubber meets the road*—or in Philip’s case in our **text**—*where the soles of the leather sandals meet the road*. But as Philip’s story demonstrates, to be available to God, we must first be *attentive* to God. Our *attentiveness* turns our *availability* into *obedience*.

—This Lenten season we are talking about disciplines that help us share Christ with others. There’s the *discipline of listening*, the *discipline of speaking*, and this week, **The Discipline of Attentiveness**. God has a program. He is actively working in the lives of people we meet, but **we must bring spiritual alertness to God-arranged opportunities**. We must practice *spiritual attentiveness* to become part of the process He is using to draw people into Christ’s Kingdom, and this passage helps us see this in the example of Philip....

I. A Strong Personal Connection with God

- A. Philip had a relationship of trust and obedience: **v.26-27**, *Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road--the desert road--that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out... ("But no angel spoke to me!"* — It takes less faith if one did; more faith if only the Spirit quietly spoke. Either way, God is after obedience.)
- B. Often there’s no agenda with guidance (humans wants a schedule of events: "*Then what?*") [Peter Strachan’s song: "One Step at a Time"]
- C. The closer we’re connected with God, the easier to hear Him. (the discipline of listening) [remote car toys: first the switch on the car must be on, then the car has to be in range... if it goes too far out of range, the car stops]

TRANS: *Attentiveness* means staying connected, and *prayer* is a way to do that. “Watch and pray,” Jesus told His disciples. It meant to stay *prayerfully attentive*. We should apply “watch and pray” throughout our day, expecting that God will tell us, if He wants us to do something or

go somewhere. If we “watch and pray,” we will hear Him, because Jesus told us, “My sheep hear my voice... and they follow me.” To *follow* we must practice this discipline of attentiveness that Philip had, and also have...

II. A Willingness to Move into God’s Opportunities

- A. It says in **v.28** that “*on his way* [Philip] *met an Ethiopian eunuch*”
 1. Many times each day, we are “*on our way*,” but if we’re Christ’s disciples, every way we are on belongs to Him, and our daily activities can actually turn into opportunities to serve Him.
 2. And when we *meet* people, on what level do we meet them? *Are we attentive to the possibility of it being a divine appointment?*
- B. Philip’s attentiveness allowed him to hear the Holy Spirit telling him, in **v.29**, “*Go to that chariot and stay near it.*” (Did you know that your presence is powerful? Your body is a traveling temple that houses the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so that wherever you go, they go, in a very special way.)

TRANS: Presence is important, but speaking up for God is more often what is needed. *Attentiveness* to the Holy Spirit is important, but often He wants to turn our attention to what people are involved in. People aren’t just numbers to win for Christ, but persons with whom God is seeking fellowship. In **v.30**, it says “*Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet.*” Some might say, “*What a coincidence!*” But we can’t think that way. We know that God is already at work in the people He leads us to, and if we are attentive to His guidance, these so-called “coincidences” are really God-arranged opportunities that we, like Philip, should step into. Philip exemplified one more thing....

III. A Openness to Be Creative in Witnessing

- A. In **v.30** Philip asked, “*Do you understand what you are reading?*”
 1. Working *creatively* with people requires first knowing what’s on their mind [When first learning massage therapy, I often did a full body massage without learning until afterward that a person needed focused body work in one particular area that I went over rather quickly.]
 2. Simple questions often show us how to help people: (*What’s your day been like? Anything you’d like me to pray for?* [and if the subject of religion or spirituality comes up] *Do you mind telling me a little about your own spiritual journey? I’d like to hear it.*)

- B. Let's read the eunuch's answer to Philip's question, "*Do you understand?*"— v.31-35, "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: "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. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.
1. We know that God is concerned about everyone's needs, and if we can learn the specific concerns people have, we are in a better position to tell them about God's concern for them.
 2. But if we are attentive to the full implications of the Gospel— how *God became man in Christ*, how *Christ's miracles showed God the Father's heart*, how *sins were paid for by Christ's death*, how *death was defeated by Christ's Resurrection*, and how *Christ will return to establish a universal Kingdom of peace and justice—we will easily find ways of showing how the Gospel of Christ reaches beyond surface concerns to the deepest needs in the hearts of the people He leads us to.*

CONCLUSION:

—Not each person we meet will be a divine appointment, but there is always that possibility with everyone we meet. And that's why we must stay connected to God with a "watch and pray" kind of prayer life. That's why we must keep our eyes and ears open to opportunities with a willingness to move into them as the Spirit leads. That's why we must keep our minds creatively alert with a deep meditation on every blessing provided in the Gospel of Christ. May God help all of us to practice the discipline of attentiveness, so that **we can be spiritually alert to every God-arranged opportunity** that comes to us.

Acts 8:26-40 (NIV)

26Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."

27So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship,

28and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet.

29The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

30Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

31"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

32The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: "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."

34The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?"

35Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

36As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?"

(37-WEB) "Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' He answered, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' "

38And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

39When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.

40Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.