

Lord, we come before you, eager to hear from your word. Would you open our eyes to your truth and empower us by your Spirit to obey? And we ask this in the sweet name of Jesus. Amen. Well, good morning.

My name is SJ. If we haven't met before, I'm one of the pastors over at Faith Presbyterian, and I'm delighted to be here this morning. I'm ordained in the EPC, our denomination, but I also grew up in it. And I remember when I was in elementary school, I asked my parents, I said, what does Evangelical Presbyterian mean? And my dad told me, well, Presbyterian means were led by elders and evangelical means that we're Bible believing.

And so when I heard the word evangelism, I thought, oh, it just means Bible believing. I was wrong. When I got to high school, my youth group went to a leadership conference at a Christian college, and they had breakout sessions where everyone came together to worship. And then you could pick breakout sessions on different topics, like hearing God's voice and other things. And the boy I had a crush on picked the session on evangelism.

So naturally, I picked the session on evangelism. And much to my horror, I found out that we were going to be doing street evangelism. They gave us the Romans road to memorize and dropped us off at a local mall and said, don't go in the stores, but you have to stay on the sidewalks, and you need to figure out how to talk to these people about Jesus. And the worst part was my crush didn't even talk to me the entire time. But afterwards, my youth group did a debrief, and I remember an older girl in my youth group noted, she's like, we went to this breakout session on evangelism, and I just couldn't believe.

We didn't even pray before we went out at the mall. I think we've all seen evangelism done poorly. We've all seen evangelism that does more harm than good. But just because we've seen something done poorly doesn't mean that we can't pioneer a way to do it well. So this morning, I want to take some time to look at what scripture says about how do we get into spiritual conversations that lead to sharing the gospel.

So I want to start by looking at the story of Philip and the Ethiopian and then look at some broader themes in scripture about how we do evangelism effectively. So here these words from the Book of Acts. Now, an angel of the Lord said to Philip, go down or go south to the road, the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of the treasury of the Khandaq, which means queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship.

And on his way home, he was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah. The prophet, the Spirit told Philip, go to that chariot and stay near it. Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah. The prophet. Do you understand what you are reading?

Philip asked. How can I? He said, unless someone explains it to me? So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading.

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation, he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants, who 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.

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized? And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

When 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. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea. So here our character Philip. I want to look at who he was and a little bit of his background. So there is a disciple named Philip who was one of the 12 with Jesus.

But the Philip we read about here later in Acts is called Philip the Evangelist, or sometimes Philip the Deacon. And

many people actually think that he was one of the 72 that Jesus said sent out in Luke chapter 10. So I want to just give you this context before we jump. In the beginning of Luke 10, Luke records, After this, the Lord appointed 72 others and sent them ahead, two by two, ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. Jesus told them, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send workers out into the harvest. So here Luke is recording Jesus appointing people to go out and evangelize, and he tells them to expect that the harvest is plentiful we'll circle back to this. But what we also know about Philip here in the story is that Philip is one of the original deacons that was appointed in the early church in Acts 6. And the author, Luke, describes the deacons repeatedly a couple of ways. He says, among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and of wisdom.

And later he describes them again, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, also Philip. And he lists more people. But what we can see here is Philip is a passionate evangelist who's in step with God's Spirit. And just before our passage in Acts 8 that Luke records that those who had been scattered preached the Word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there.

When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. And then in verse 26, where a passage, passage today starts, it says, now an angel of the Lord said to Philip. What's important to note in this transition between scenes is that Philip is in step with God's Spirit. And he's not only willing to hear God, but he also obeys God, even when the pathway isn't clear. In verse 27, it says, so he started out and went on his way.

Now, notice that God doesn't tell Philip exactly what to do. He doesn't tell him he's going to run into this Ethiopian. It just records that on his way he met this Ethiopian eunuch. But in the next verse, all that God or that the Spirit tells Philip is, go to that chariot and stay near it. He doesn't say, hey, you're going to meet this person and you're going to share the gospel with them.

He only reveals one step at a time. And Luke in his narration of this tells us that the eunuch was on his way home, sitting in a chariot, reading Isaiah the prophet. Now, I don't know about you, but someone reading the Bible, if that's not a sign they're spiritually open, I don't know what is. But I think Philip exemplifies one of the best ways of discerning if someone is spiritually open. Philip asks a question.

He says to this Ethiopian, he says, do you know what you are reading in the next verse? I got off here. He says, do you understand what you are reading? Philip asked. And the man replies, how can I unless someone explains it to me?

So this Ethiopian man is reading from Isaiah 53. And this is a beautiful poetic prophecy foreshadowing the Gospel of Jesus. And while Luke doesn't take the time to define the gospel here in Acts for us. I want to steal a summary from Paul that I think explains it really well. What is the essence of the gospel that we believe?

And that's 1 Corinthians 15, Paul records. He says, now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you. For what I received, I passed on to you as a first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

What repeats in that passage?

According to the Scriptures, yes. Yeah. We have so many prophetic like meanings about Jesus in the Old Testament. So God brings across Philip's path this man who's been spiritually interested. He's gone to Jerusalem and he's reading his Bible.

He's seeking truth. So God uses Philip to proclaim the gospel to this man. He heeds it and he's ready to get baptized. It's amazing. And then God continues to use Philip elsewhere.

So I want to grapple with how does this story apply to Christians in the church today? How does this apply to Christians in the church today? I think our first takeaway from this is that Philip was a man full of the Holy Spirit. But second, Philip is also a good listener and he asks good questions. He appears to be situationally aware, but at the same time, he

doesn't lecture this Ethiopian man.

He asks questions to gauge his spiritual receptivity. But I think as well that Philip believes that God is working in people's hearts, priming the harvest before him. That's why I brought up Luke 10:2. At the start, this Ethiopian man was already reading the Bible and drawing this person to himself. And Philip just had to be obedient to what he asked him to do.

And then after all of that, Philip shares the good news of the Gospel. Living a good life is not enough to share the gospel with other people. We have to use our words. Romans 10 talks about how can they know God? How can they hear if someone hasn't been sent to preach to them?

We have to unabashedly and boldly preach the gospel. But I want to take some time to look at other places in Scripture and figure out how do we get into spiritual conversations in the first place? How do we get into spiritual conversations that lead to sharing the gospel? Because just like that teen leadership conference I went to, I memorized this Romans Road script. But I never found myself in the perfect conditions to be able to use the script that I memorized and so my encouragement to you is I want to look at what other Christians have done and what we see in Scripture on this.

And first and foremost is that we begin in prayer. When we are trying to share the Gospel, we have to begin with prayer. While we don't have Philip the evangelist's prayers recorded, we see again and again the apostles relying on God's power to share the good news of Jesus Christ. I love how in Paul's letter to the Colossians, he asks for God's power to share the the Gospel. He says, devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful, and pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ for which I am in chains.

He goes on, he says, pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. So I would encourage all of you to ask God to help you share your faith wherever you're at in that journey, whether it's God. I'm really uncomfortable with evangelism. Can you help me here? Or maybe there's people in your life and you're like God, would you please bring this person to saving knowledge of your son, Jesus Christ?

For me, my prayer lately has been, God, show me where you're already at work and how I might join you. Show me where you're already at work and how I might join you. But I also want to look at themes of evangelism and discipleship in the Old Testament. As part of our worship, we read the shema from Deuteronomy 6 and the command to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and all of your mind. But it goes on.

In verse seven, it says, impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lay down, and when you get up.

And what we can infer from this as part of God's plan for his people for evangelism and discipleship is to talk about our love for God. Our first call is to evangelize our families, to evangelize to our children, to disciple them, and to continue doing that in our spheres of influence. And I sincerely believe that loving God means we talk about him all the time. Loving God means we talk about him all the time. But this is tough.

I think we've all been taught in one way or another to filter out what our Christianity from our conversations. I know I'm guilty of having one version of a conversation with my friends from church and a different conversation with my unchurched friends.

And I'm right here in the trenches with you guys on all of this. I'm not just a pastor, I'm bivocational. I have a full time job outside the church. And so I wrestle through how do I. How do I share my faith with other people?

How do I do this? In some ways, it was easier when I was a full time pastor because people would come up and say, you know, say, oh, what do you do for work? That's usually the second or third question we ask people in our culture and say, oh, I'm a pastor. And they'd go, oh, I'm so sorry for swearing. And I was so tempted to be like, I don't give up.

But I never did. I should try that sometime.

But now when I meet people out in the world, they don't know I'm a Christian. I don't have that easy segue into those conversations anymore. But the Lord has really convicted me to be open about my Christianity and my spirituality in the mission world. Our workers who are spreading the gospel among the nations are using a tool that they call shema statements. Shema statements.

And Based on Deuteronomy 6, their premise is that we need to talk about God with other people and that anything that we say that shows that we are followers of God is an effective way to get into spiritual conversations with other people. So I want to read an excerpt from a missionary. His name is Kevin King. His new evangelism book is called Living out Loud. And he says, shema statements are not the gospel.

They're not enough for a person to know Christ. But shema statements open the door for the gospel. And the best way to begin speaking shema statements is to learn to recognize the spiritual thoughts you have, but suppress and give yourself permission to stop biting your tongue and to learn to let your mouth open and let the overflow of your heart speak. Because if you love the Lord your God with all your heart, therefore you will talk about him all the time. And while sometimes God will give us clear instructions, like he did to fill up with the Ethiopian where he says, go and stand near that chariot, before that, we have to remember God has commanded us in his scripture in the parable of the Sower, that we are to cast the seeds of the gospel indiscriminately and that we are to talk about him with other people everywhere we go.

And what I know that I've gotten wrong and that I think the church has gotten wrong about evangelism is we do this thing where we try to gauge someone's spiritual receptivity before we bring up Jesus. We try to prejudge, is this person open to the gospel? Is this person not open? But then we end up not saying anything at all. But more than that, nowhere in scripture are we told, hey, you need to figure out if this person is open to the gospel, so why are we doing that?

So as we consider what the parable of the Sower says, Jesus wants us to know that it's our job to cast seed indiscriminately, to talk about Jesus generously with other people. But I think the other lie that I know I've been prone to believe is that relational evangelism is the only way to spread the gospel. And what I mean by that is sometimes I think there have been Christian leaders who have overemphasized that you have to be friends with someone, you have to build trust before you can share the gospel. But the harm of that is it can end up being a bait and switch where you try to build trust with someone for weeks or months or years, and then you bring up church and they're like, you're a Christian. But what we see in scripture here with the story of Philip and the Ethiopian is that God has already tended the garden here.

This man is ready to be harvested. Philip didn't have any sort of relationship with him. Philip was just in step with the Holy Spirit and obeyed God's instruction and noticed that this man was spiritually hungry. And he obeyed by following that. So beware of the lie that you have to be friends with someone before sharing the gospel.

It could just be someone that you're standing in line with, someone who you've never met before. Cast the seeds of the gospel indiscriminately by talking about your love for God freely with other people. So practically, what do Shema statements look like? What do Shamas statements look like? It's talking about what God has done in your life.

So if someone asks you tomorrow, they say, hey, what did you do this weekend? Mention that you went to church. Don't edit that out of your conversation. If someone shares with you something, their growth plan at work or what they're working on, share what God's been teaching you. Say, oh, God's been growing me in patience too.

But at the same time, we also want to call out God's goodness in other people's lives. Call out God's goodness in other people's lives. So when one of your friends says, oh, I got engaged, instead of just saying Congrats. Try saying, wow, God has brought you the love of your life. If someone tells you that they did an athletic competition over the weekend, you can say, wow, God has given you such a strong body.

And just see how they respond. Don't push it, but just gauge their spiritual receptivity. After you say or talk about your love for God and who he is, and maybe someone will just say, okay. But you might find that when you say, oh, God has brought you the love of your life, they might respond and say, you really think so? And just respond with your love for God.

Say, yeah, God loves us so much that he wanted us to experience his love inside the bounds of marriage. And ask if you can share a Bible passage with them from that. If you're on a walk with a friend at a park and they say, oh, these flowers are beautiful, you can say, isn't God such a beautiful artist? And just see how they respond to those things. And while those are all positive examples, I think we can also use shema statements in hard moments.

When someone gets a devastating diagnosis, don't use a spiritual platitude like, everything happens for a reason. Nobody wants to hear that. But just say, oh, that's awful. I'm so sorry you got that news. Can I pray with you right now?

And just acknowledge with people that we live in a broken world and things are not how they should be? Things are not how they should be. Our families are broken. We have kids in our county who are hungry in the summer when they don't have food provided at school.

Some of us, our bodies don't work how they're supposed to.

And as we get to know people, we can share our hope with them. We can share our hope with them, and we can share our own struggles and how the hope of the gospel meets us there. Whether it's God's power that has helped you overcome an addictive, sinful tendency or how God has comforted you. A horrible family situation. Talk about God.

Talk about how God has comforted you. Talk about what God has taught you. Because if we love God, we can't help but speak freely about what he's done in our lives.

In my own life, I struggle with chronic illness and chronic pain. Sometimes I have to preach sitting down because my body doesn't cooperate. And if I have a bad flare, I have to work laying down. And unfortunately, being chronically ill isn't something that you can hide. I have to speak up and ask for accommodations.

But a few years ago, one of my co workers asked me, I was laying down in a work meeting, and she said, how are you so joyful despite your suffering? This coworker knew I was a Christian, knew I was a pastor, and I just told her, because of Jesus, my hope is that my suffering is not forever because of Jesus. And I left it at that. But if she had responded, your hope is in Jesus, or like, why would you say that? I would have told her the fullness of the gospel, right?

That's how we get into spiritual conversations with people, is we talk about our love for God and what he's done for us. And that opens the door for us to proclaim that we have a God who cared so much about the problem of pain and so much about the problem of suffering that he sent his son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for our sins. And he rose again from the dead. And he's making all things new. And my hope is in his second coming, because I get a new body that doesn't hurt and it isn't going to be broken anymore.

So what is your hope in?

How can you share your love for God with others?

So begin with prayer. Wherever you're at in your evangelism journey, say God, I'm hesitant about this. I'm nervous. I'm scared about losing my job.

I don't want to look silly. I don't want to be embarrassed. Tell him.

And from there, we have to preach the gospel to ourselves to be able to effectively share it with others and then sow the seeds of that gospel. Generously, generously share what God has done on our behalf through Jesus Christ and just gauge people's spiritual receptivity however they respond. You don't have to be pushy, but just ask questions and ask God to bring you spiritually hungry people. Ask him to show you where he's already at work and how you might join him. And from there, ask God to show you where you can invite people to take their next spiritual steps.

Whether it's praying with them, telling them a Bible story, or inviting them to church, this is how we find spiritually receptive people so that we can extend the gospel to them. Pray with me, Lord, we thank you for your salvation through

Jesus Christ. Show us how to be a church that generously cast the seed of the gospel. Show us how we can be a church where we are in step with your spirit, Lord. Lord, I just ask that for this church that you would help us to have effective evangelism.

Lord, I just ask boldly that there would be baptisms here, Lord, and new believers who then help us reach even more new people, Father. And we ask all of this in Jesus name, Amen.