

Explore the Bible Series for June 22: Philip: Consistency

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When is the right time to share your faith with someone? While many believers might correctly state that anytime is the right time, in practice, most seem to connect witnessing with participation in some specifically Christian or church-related activity.

For example, most have little problem sharing faith experiences within a Sunday school class or during church visitation or while on a mission trip, but do not associate telling someone about the gospel in the ordinary activities of daily life. While some may see non-religious social occasions as inappropriate settings for sharing a personal witness, many others simply never think of these settings as opportunities to witness. Others may see such evangelizing as the special duty of the minister.

Yet nowhere does the Bible specify the “proper conditions” needed in order for a believer to share their faith. Indeed, the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19 instructs all believers to spread the gospel “as you go,” that is, at all times and in all situations.

Finally, there are believers who take Saint Francis’ admonition to “preach the gospel at all times and, when necessary, use words” as support for letting their actions speak for them. Yet while actions and behavior may set a person apart, they only serve as a witness when accompanied by verbal explanations.

As we look at the life of Philip, we can see and learn from one who understood that God calls all believers to be a consistent witness everywhere they go.

New circumstances (Acts 8:4-8)

With the stoning of Stephen, the early believers scattered beyond the area around Jerusalem in fear the authorities would come after them. Many found themselves in places they had never been before. They were confronted with people they did not know who often had unfamiliar customs and traditions.

Yet they knew the gospel they proclaimed cut across all differences and revealed truth to all hearers. Their methods for delivering the message might change as circumstances dictated, but it was the same message that spoke to people in all the situations of life.

Even though he was in the new area, fearing the authorities and not knowing if the local population would turn him in, Philip continued to speak and act in a way that attracted people and pointed them to Jesus.

Today, we may find God specifically calling on us to share our witness in circumstances that are new or in which we have never considered talking about our faith. We can fulfill this call by either verbally sharing the gospel, distributing tracts or Bibles or inviting someone to church. Whatever form our witnessing takes, we always should remember that God has sent us into the world as messengers with the task of spreading God's message of hope in whatever circumstances we find ourselves.

Challenging conditions (Acts 8:9-13)

Although we may wish it to be different, we all know life as a witness is not always easy. People are not always drawn to our speaking about the gospel. Often, we find people are completely indifferent or even slightly hostile to

our evangelistic efforts. It often is challenging and difficult to gain an audience in order to be heard.

The Bible tells us Philip entered an area where the people were attracted to the magical signs and the words of a magician. Philip's message was quite different than Simon's, but it was a challenge to get the people to listen and accept his truth over Simon's impressive demonstrations. Philip, however, refused to alter his message or draw people in through sleight of hand. Instead, he consistently proclaimed the gospel, and eventually the people listened. The Bible says even Simon accepted Philip's message.

Often when we encounter difficulties in witnessing, it can be tempting to resort to flashy productions or to soften the message. But God calls us to be consistent in unapologetically presenting the gospel even in the midst of challenging conditions.

Special situations (Acts 8:29-38)

While we are to share our faith in the ordinary activities of life, there may be times when we find ourselves in unusual situations through which we have a special opportunity to point someone to Jesus.

For Philip, this came as God led him to a place where he had the unique chance to speak to an Ethiopian who had been reading the Hebrew Scriptures. It was a case of being in the "right place at the right time" as he was able to answer this man's questions.

For us today, this special situation may be in the aftermath of a tragedy or disaster. In those times, so many people are looking for comfort and hope. Sensitive believers have the opportunity in such times to point people to God and demonstrate his love in word and deed.

At other times, God may inspire a believer to share with a particular nonbeliever with whom there is already a close relationship. In such special situations, as the saying goes, you may be the only Bible that other person may ever read.

The story of Philip thus teaches us that God desires us to consistently witness and share our faith in whatever circumstance we may be and always be watchful for those special “divine appointments” which God leads us into in order that someone might be drawn into a closer relationship with God.