

Acts chapter 8 is a turning point in the story of the early church. Up to this point, the believers have been centered in Jerusalem. Now persecution scatters them—and God uses that scattering to spread the gospel into Judea, Samaria, and beyond. What looks like a disaster becomes the very means by which the word of God advances.

We meet three key people in this chapter:

- Saul, the persecutor
- Philip, the evangelist
- The Ethiopian official, the seeker

And in the middle, we see both the reality of spiritual counterfeits (Simon the sorcerer) and the genuine work of the Holy Spirit.

1. Persecution, Saul, and the scattering of the church (Acts 8:1–4)

Stephen has just been stoned to death. Standing there, watching and approving, is a young Pharisee named Saul:

“Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” (Acts 8:1)

Devout men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him (Acts 8:2), but Saul was relentless:

“As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.” (Acts 8:3)

He was convinced he was defending God by attacking followers of Jesus. Yet Stephen’s death, his shining face, and his Christlike forgiveness left a mark on Saul’s conscience. Later, when the risen Lord stopped him on the road to Damascus, Jesus said:

“It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” (Acts 9:5)

Stephen’s testimony was one of those goads—an uncomfortable, holy pressure from God on Saul’s heart.

Persecution scattered the believers:

“Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” (Acts 8:4)

The authorities tried to crush the church; instead, they unintentionally launched a missionary movement.

Practical application for believers:

God can use painful, unwanted circumstances—opposition, loss, disruption—to move us into places and relationships we never would have chosen, so that others can hear about Jesus. When life “scatters” you, ask:

- “Lord, how do You want to use me here?”
- “Who around me needs to hear of Your love?”

2. Philip in Samaria: the gospel and great joy (Acts 8:5–8)

Philip, one of the seven chosen to serve in Acts chapter 6, now steps into a wider ministry:

“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.” (Acts 8:5)

The Samaritans already had some expectation of Messiah. In the Gospels, the woman at the well said:

“I know that Messiah is coming... When He comes, He will tell us all things.” (John 4:25)

So when Philip comes announcing that the Messiah has come and His name is Jesus, the people are ready to listen:

“And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.” (Acts 8:6)

God confirms Philip’s message with powerful works:

“For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city.” (Acts 8:7–8)

Where Jesus is truly preached and received, there is real joy—not because life suddenly becomes easy, but because God’s forgiveness, presence, and power become real.

Practical application:

If your relationship with God feels joyless and dry, ask yourself:

- Am I holding something back from Him?
- Have I drifted into religious routine while losing sight of the living Jesus?
- Do I still marvel that my sins are forgiven through His blood shed on the cross and that He is risen, alive, and with me?

Joy grows as we stay close to Jesus, listen to His word, and walk in obedience.

3. Simon the sorcerer: spiritual power versus spiritual reality (Acts 8:9–24)

In Samaria there was a man named Simon:

“But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great.” (Acts 8:9)

The people were impressed with him and said:

“This man is the great power of God.” (Acts 8:10)

He had captivated them for a long time with his magic and deception. But when Philip preached about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, the people believed and were baptized, both men and women (Acts 8:12). Even Simon himself believed and was baptized, and he stayed close to Philip, amazed at the genuine miracles he saw (Acts 8:13).

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word, they sent Peter and John (Acts 8:14). They came and prayed for these new believers:

“Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 8:17)

The Spirit was already in them as believers, but now He came upon them in a special way for power and witness, just as Jesus had promised:

“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me...” (Acts 1:8)

There must have been some visible or audible sign of this empowering, because when Simon saw what happened through the laying on of hands, he reacted like a man of the world:

“He offered them money, saying, ‘Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit.’” (Acts 8:18–19)

Peter’s response is sharp and sobering:

“Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.” (Acts 8:20–23)

Simon had believed and been baptized, but his heart was still tangled in old attitudes:

- He wanted spiritual power for himself.
- He was still bitter and jealous over losing influence.
- He tried to buy what God gives as a gift of grace.

He asks Peter to pray for him (Acts 8:24), which at least shows some fear of God and a recognition of his danger.

Challenge for believers:

It is possible to be outwardly involved in Christian things while inwardly driven by pride, jealousy, or the desire for recognition. Ask the Lord to search your heart:

- Do I want God to use me for His glory or for my ego?
- Am I secretly resentful when someone else is used more visibly than I am?
- Am I trying to “leverage” spiritual things for personal advantage?

Bitterness and hidden sin do not just sit quietly in the soul; they poison us from the inside. God calls us to confess and forsake such things, not manage them.

4. The gift of the Holy Spirit: power for service

This passage in Samaria highlights something important: there is a difference between the Spirit dwelling in us as we come to Christ and the Spirit coming upon us in power to serve.

- The Samaritans had believed and been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 8:12, Acts 8:16).
- They clearly belonged to Christ.
- Yet the Spirit had “fallen upon” none of them until Peter and John came and laid hands on them (Acts 8:16–17).

The Holy Spirit is the One who brings us to faith in the first place, and every true believer has the Spirit living in them. But Scripture also shows that God empowers His people in a fresh way so they can boldly witness, serve, and endure. That is what we see here.

Practical application:

If you are a believer, you are not meant to serve God in your own strength. You can ask your Father to fill and empower you:

“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Luke 11:13)

This is not about chasing a feeling; it is about asking God to fill and use you, humbly and obediently, for His purposes.

5. Philip and the Ethiopian official: God’s guidance and a sincere seeker (Acts 8:26–40)

While Peter and John return to Jerusalem preaching the gospel in Samaritan villages (Acts 8:25), the Lord gives Philip a very specific instruction:

“Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, ‘Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ This is desert.” (Acts 8:26)

No explanation. No ten-year plan. Just: “Go to that road.”

Philip obeys. As he walks that desert road, he sees a chariot. Inside is an Ethiopian official, a man of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of all her treasury (Acts 8:27). He had come to Jerusalem to worship and is now returning, reading the prophet Isaiah as he rides (Acts 8:28).

He is religious, sincere, and still spiritually hungry. He has been to the temple but has not yet found the answer his heart longs for.

Then the Spirit speaks again:

“Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go near and overtake this chariot.’” (Acts 8:29)

Philip runs up beside the chariot and hears the man reading from Isaiah:

“Do you understand what you are reading?” (Acts 8:30)

The official answers honestly:

“How can I, unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:31)

He invites Philip to sit with him. The passage he is reading is from Isaiah 53:

*“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.
In His humiliation His justice was taken away,
And who will declare His generation?
For His life is taken from the earth.” (Acts 8:32–33; Isaiah 53)*

The official asks the key question:

“I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?” (Acts 8:34)

Philip has been perfectly set up by God. Scripture has already prepared the way. A hungry heart is already searching. Philip simply does what all of us are called to do:

“Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.” (Acts 8:35)

Isaiah 53 points to Jesus—the Lamb of God, despised and rejected, who bore our sins and was led to death without defending Himself. On the cross He shed His blood for us. The empty tomb declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord.

As they travel, they come to some water, and the official says:

“See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36)

Philip replies:

“If you believe with all your heart, you may.” (Acts 8:37)

The man makes a clear confession:

“I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” (Acts 8:37)

They stop the chariot, go down into the water, and Philip baptizes him (Acts 8:38). When they come up out of the water:

“The Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.” (Acts 8:39)

Philip is suddenly relocated to Azotus and continues preaching in all the cities until he comes to Caesarea (Acts 8:40), where he eventually settles and continues to serve the Lord.

The Ethiopian official, once spiritually empty but sincerely searching, now returns home rejoicing, knowing the Savior personally. From very early in church history there has been a Christian witness in that region—no doubt connected to this encounter.

Practical application for believers:

- **Be available for God’s “desert road” assignments.**
Philip left a thriving work in Samaria to obey a seemingly strange command. Some of God’s most significant works in and through your life will not be in front of crowds but in personal, ordinary moments with one person.
- **Trust God to lead step by step.**
Philip did not get all the details at once. He got one clear step: go to the road. The next step came once he obeyed the first. That is often how God leads us.
- **Be ready to explain the gospel from Scripture.**
Philip did not rely on clever tricks. He simply used the Scripture that was already open and showed how it pointed to Jesus. Ask God to help you grow in knowing His word so you can do the same.

A challenge for believers

Acts chapter 8 challenges us in several ways:

1. **Are you willing to follow Jesus wherever He sends you?**
Whether that means enduring hardship, being “scattered” into a new season, leaving something comfortable, or walking down an unknown “desert road,” will you say, “Lord, I am available”?
2. **Are you harboring bitterness or jealousy like Simon?**
It is possible to be outwardly involved in ministry while inwardly resentful. If the Spirit shows you bitterness, pride, or selfish ambition, do not excuse it. Agree with God about it, confess it, and ask Him to change your heart.
3. **Are you depending on the Holy Spirit’s power or your own strength?**
The early believers needed the Spirit to come upon them for bold witness and effective ministry. So do we. Ask the Lord to fill and empower you daily.
4. **Are you willing to speak to “one person in a chariot”?**
Sometimes we dream of big platforms and large crowds, but God may put just one searching soul in your path. Will you be faithful with that one?

An invitation to those who do not yet know Christ

Perhaps you are like the Ethiopian official:

- You believe in God in a general way.
- You have tried religion, rituals, or spiritual searching.
- But your heart is still empty, and you know you are not yet right with God.

The good news is that God sees you, just as He saw that man on the desert road. He knows your questions, your sins, your fears, and your longings.

The Scripture that Ethiopian man read is still true:

*“He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.”* (Isaiah 53:5)

Jesus willingly took your place. On the cross He shed His blood for your sins—every one of them. On the third day God raised Him from the dead, declaring that He is God, Savior, and Lord. He offers you forgiveness, a new heart, and eternal life as a gift of grace.

The question is the same one Philip asked:

“If you believe with all your heart, you may.” (Acts 8:37)

Will you turn from your sin and trust Jesus with all your heart?

If you are ready, you can respond to Him right now. Your own words are best, but you might pray something like this:

“Lord God, I admit that I am a sinner and I cannot save myself. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins, shedding His blood for me, and that You raised Him from the dead. I believe that He is Your Son and my only Savior. I turn from my sin and ask You to forgive me. Please come into my life, make me new, and teach me to follow You. I place my trust in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.”

If you sincerely turn to Him, He will not turn you away. The same risen Lord who met Saul, who saved Samaritans, and who reached that Ethiopian official will receive you, forgive you, and begin a real work in your life. And like that man on the desert road, you can go on your way rejoicing.