

**Acts 8:26–40**

**Ps. 22:25–31**

**1 John 4:7–21**

**John 15:1–8**

# Embraced by God's Love

**Goal for  
the Session**

*Tweens will study the story of the Ethiopian official and be reminded that God's love and power have no limits.*

## ■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

### Focus on Acts 8:26–40

#### WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Paul W. Walaskay

Luke tells us a great deal about these two men. Philip is one of seven Greek-speaking Jewish Christians appointed to tend to the needs of others (Acts 6:1–6). The Ethiopian is in charge of the treasury of the Candace, the official title of the queen mother, head of the government in Ethiopia. That he travels by chariot attests to his status. That he possesses a scroll of the prophet Isaiah attests to his wealth. Moreover, we are told that he is a eunuch, a not unusual situation for one whose life is devoted to serving in the queen's court. As a castrated male, he would not have been granted access to the temple (see Deuteronomy 23:1).

#### WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Karen Baker-Fletcher

Notice the text's description of how the Spirit of God moves Philip to act and teach. When the messenger of God says to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza” (v. 26), Philip immediately gets up and goes. Upon seeing the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip *runs* to the chariot where the eunuch, in charge of the queen's treasury, is sitting. He immediately asks the eunuch if he understands the passage from Isaiah (53:7–8) that the eunuch is reading aloud.

#### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Thomas G. Long

As the gospel moves into the world, it gathers under the wings of God's mercy more and more of those who have been lost, pushed away, and forgotten. “What is to prevent me from being baptized?” asked the eunuch. “Absolutely nothing,” whispered the Spirit. So the eunuch commanded the chariot to stop, and he was baptized right on the spot. Walls of prejudice and prohibition that had stood for generations came tumbling down by the breath of God's Holy Spirit, and another man who felt lost and humiliated was found and restored in the wideness of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

#### NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Barbara Brown Taylor

It is Philip's grounding in his tradition that enables him to recognize God's leading—even when it leads him places no human authority has told him he may go—and to act in the power of the Spirit. If we were to surrender control of our own travel plans for even an hour, where might the Spirit send us? How many of our accidental encounters with other people are really divine appointments? How can we learn to tell the difference between the two?

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

**Acts 8:26–40**

## Focus on Your Teaching

Bonds with their peers and group dynamics are increasingly important to tweens. Most learners in your group know who is “in” and who is “out” at school and church. Some have been a part of a group that has excluded others, while others have experienced the pain of being on the outside. Tweens are able to quickly identify those things that cause alienation and loneliness. This session provides the opportunity to name some of those things and explore how God’s love can reach out and overcome such barriers.

*God of new life, as I explore this Scripture, break down any barriers in my heart and bring me to a deeper understanding of your unlimited love for all. Amen.*

**YOU WILL NEED**

- ☐ white cloth
- ☐ gold or yellow streamers or ribbons
- ☐ large white battery-powered candle
- ☐ Resource Sheet 1
- ☐ Color Pack 20, 30
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ newsprint, markers
- ☐ sticky notes, pens
- ☐ bowl of water
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player

**For Responding**

- ☐ option 1: newsprint, markers
- ☐ option 2: Internet-connected device, paper, pens
- ☐ option 3: copies of Resource Sheet 2 on card stock, supplies listed on sheet

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

As tweens arrive, greet each by name, saying, “(Name), the Lord is risen!” As needed, prompt learners to respond, “Christ is risen indeed!”

Invite tweens to work together to arrange the white cloth in the center of your meeting space, placing the candle on the fabric and arranging gold or yellow streamers in a festive design. Tell them that this is the fifth Sunday of the Easter season. As you light the candle, say, “The light of the risen Christ is with us!” Pass the candle from person to person, inviting tweens, as they hold the candle, to tell about a high point or low point during the past week. Offer this prayer:

*Creator God, send your Spirit to teach us more about the welcoming love of Jesus. Amen.*

Explain that when you call a number, tweens must quickly form groups of that size. At first, use numbers that ensure everyone is included in a group, such as “3” and “2” for a group of six. Then use numbers that make it impossible for everyone to find a place, such as “5” for a group of six. Finish by calling out the number of tweens present, so that they form one group. Discuss:

- ✠ What was it like to be included in one of the groups? What was it like to be excluded?
- ✠ Describe a time when you saw someone being excluded in some way.

Say that today the Bible story tells about someone who was excluded from worshiping God fully and freely.

A eunuch was a man whose testicles had been removed, so that he didn't exhibit typical male characteristics. In Jesus' time, eunuchs were often employed as high officers or given positions of trust in the courts of rulers or royalty.

## EXPLORING

Ask tweens to turn to the table of contents in their Bibles. Point out how the book of Acts comes right after the four Gospels. Recall together how the Gospels tell about the life and teachings of Jesus, and the book of Acts continues the story by telling how Jesus' followers took the good news of Jesus into the world. Turn to Acts 8:26–35. Read aloud the story as tweens follow along in their Bibles.

Form two groups and give each group one half of Resource Sheet 1 (Introductions). Have each group read the information on its sheet and answer the questions. Ask each group to introduce its character to the other group.

Form pairs in which one person is Philip and the other is the Ethiopian official. Have all tweens who are Philip take three steps away from their partners. Ask tweens to close their eyes and recall silently the conversation between the two characters in the story as you ask: What does Philip ask? How does the official answer? How did Philip respond? If you were Philip, what would you say about Jesus? With eyes open, have tweens playing Philip begin to role-play the story by moving to the tweens playing the official and starting the conversation. Finish the role plays and, if you have time, have tweens reverse roles.

Gather the group and invite speculation about what happens next, then read aloud Acts 8:36–40. Discuss:

- ✠ Philip and the Ethiopian official are the two main people in this story, but there is a third character who plays an important role. Who is it? (v. 29)
- ✠ What do we know about the Ethiopian official's faith? What barriers had he encountered as he tried to worship God?
- ✠ How did God reach out to this official? What does this tell us about God?

Look at Color Pack 20 and invite comments and observations. Ask a volunteer to read the quotation on this picture. Remind tweens that the word *gospel* means good news of Jesus. Ask:

- ✠ Who was gathered under the wings of God's mercy in this story?
- ✠ In what way might he have felt lost, pushed away, or forgotten?
- ✠ What role did Philip play?
- ✠ Who do we know that might feel lost, pushed away, or forgotten?
- ✠ How might these people be gathered under the wings of God's love and mercy?
- ✠ How might we serve like Philip did?

Distribute sticky notes and pens. Play some reflective music, such as "Music for Meditation" (track 16 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Ask tweens to think of a time when they felt lost, pushed away, or forgotten, and then to imagine what it feels like to be gathered under the wings of God's love. Have tweens print their names on sticky notes and place them on Color Pack 20, under the wings of the hen. Speak these words to each learner: "(Name), you are gathered under the wings of God's love."

EASY  
PREP

## RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- 1. Gospel Scavenger Hunt** Observe that there are many places in the Gospels where Jesus broke down barriers to show God's unlimited love for all. Form small groups for some good-natured competition. Write these Scripture references on newsprint: *John 4:7–9*, *Luke 8:41–53*, *Matthew 19:13–15*, and *Mark 6:35–44*. Award a round of applause to the first group to name four examples of God breaking down barriers and reaching out through Jesus. Together, imagine ways that God might work through tweens to show God's unlimited love for all.
- 2. Words** The Spirit gave Philip's words the power to welcome, nurture understanding, and bring new life. Watch the YouTube video "The Power of Words" at [bit.ly/FOWPowerWords](https://bit.ly/FOWPowerWords). Invite tweens' comments and observations. Discuss: What words did Philip and the official use that demonstrated faith? What words can exclude others? What words can include and welcome? Recall that the Ethiopian official encountered barriers as he tried to worship God. How might God break down barriers through our words? Invite tweens to create a group pledge to use words that break down barriers and spread God's love to others.
- 3. Words of Encouragement** Like Philip, tweens can reach out with the message of God's love. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Bird and Chicks Stencil) made on card stock. Read aloud the instructions. Provide materials for tweens to stencil a number of cards. When the cards are dry, work as a group to think of messages of hope and encouragement that can be written inside the cards, such as *You are sheltered under the wings of God's love*. Plan how tweens might deliver or mail the cards to people they know who need a word of encouragement.

### Amazing Grace

Amazing grace, how sweet  
the sound,  
That saved someone like  
me.  
I once was lost but now am  
found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

Through many dangers,  
toils, and snares  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace that brought me  
safe thus far,  
and grace will lead me  
home.

When we've been here ten  
thousand years  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing  
God's praise  
Than when we'd first  
begun.

## CLOSING

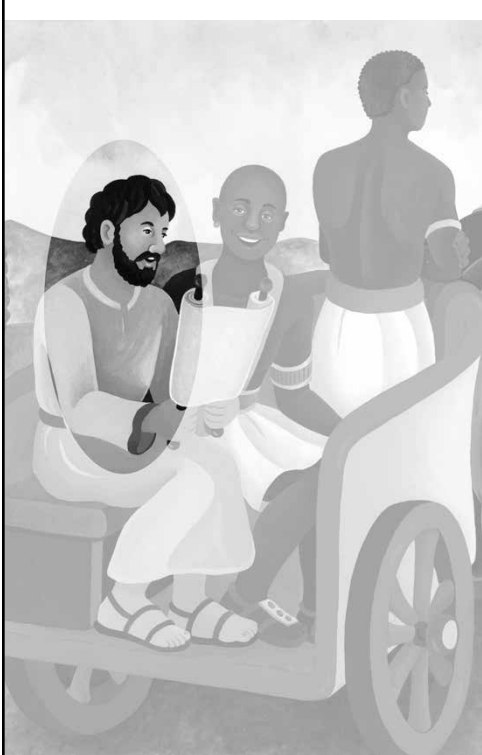
Gather the group and light the candle. Place a bowl of water on the white fabric. Dip your hand in the water, letting water splash back into the bowl, as you say, "In baptism, we are called by Christ Jesus into a new and changed life." Invite tweens to take turns dipping a hand in the water as they name one way they might be like Philip or the Ethiopian in the week ahead.

Close by singing "Amazing Grace" (Color Pack 30, track 1 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024).

Extinguish the candle.

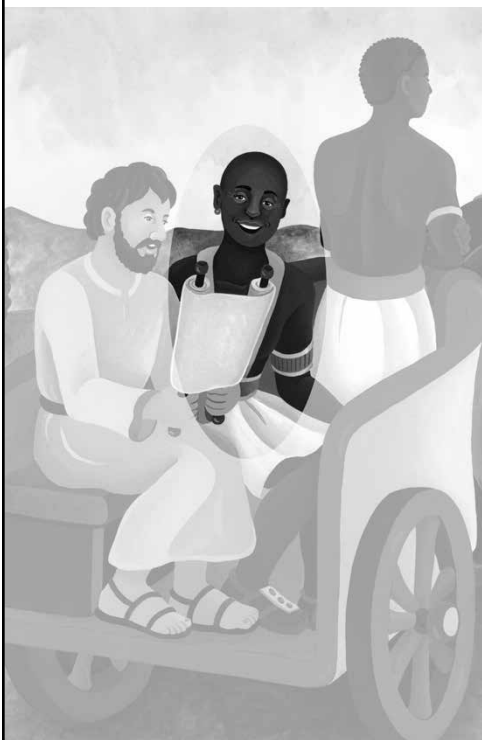
As you say good-bye to tweens, speak a word of thanks for their participation in church school.

## Introductions



### Meet Philip

- ☐ He is a follower of Jesus.
- ☐ He is one of the leaders of the church of Jerusalem. He is a deacon, chosen by the disciples to look after those in need.
- ☐ In Acts 6:4–5, Philip is described as being one of seven men who was known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.
- ☐ Read Acts 8:5–13. What does this story tell you about Philip?
- ☐ Based on what you have read and heard today, plan a way to introduce Philip to the other group.



### Meet the Ethiopian Official

- ☐ He is in charge of the treasury of the queen, the head of the government in Ethiopia.
- ☐ He travels by chariot, which indicates he has high status and wealth.
- ☐ Eunuchs and foreigners are not allowed to participate fully in temple worship in Jerusalem.
- ☐ Read Acts 8:27–28. Why had the official gone to Jerusalem?
- ☐ What is the official doing when he meets Philip? What does this tell you about him?
- ☐ Based on what you have read and heard today, plan a way to introduce the Ethiopian official to the other group.

## Bird and Chicks Stencil

### You Will Need

- ☐ copy of this page on card stock
- ☐ sharp scissors or craft knife
- ☐ masking tape
- ☐ tempera paint
- ☐ paper plate
- ☐ small piece of sponge, held by a clothespin
- ☐ plain paper

### Instructions

1. Use sharp scissors or a craft knife to carefully cut out the parts of the stencil marked with an X.
2. Fold a piece of plain paper in half and place it on a flat surface, securing the corners with bits of masking tape.
3. Position the stencil on the paper so the design will be right-side up as the card is opened. Secure the corners with bits of masking tape.
4. Place a small amount of tempera paint on a paper plate.
5. Touch the sponge lightly to the paint, and then dab paint over the open spaces of the stencil.
6. Carefully remove the stencil and use it to make another card.

