

Bridging the Gap

Pastor Ashwin Ramani

February 1/2, 2014

THE MAIN THING: God has caused a great number of immigrants and refugees to move to Canada, and he wants the church to partner with him in making disciples of all nations right where we are. All of us know that people of other religions live in our neighbourhoods, work with us in our offices, and go to school with our kids. Yet there is a great disconnect between Christians and immigrants. How can we bridge this gap?

PURSUE RELATIONSHIP: *Connect and pray as a group*

1. Describe the demographics of your neighbourhood. Have you noticed any major changes in the last few years?
2. What negative or prejudiced opinions have you heard about immigrants?
3. Let someone in your group share a personal experience they have had with cultural bias.

PURSUE GOD: *Time that is devoted to the Word of God*

Observation and Reflection

1. Review the story of Philip and the Eunuch. Where was Samaria? Where was Ethiopia? (Check a Bible map.) Why was Philip in Samaria? Who is a 'eunuch'? How was this person described in Deuteronomy 23:1? Why was the eunuch in Jerusalem?
2. What did it mean for Philip, an Orthodox Jewish deacon to interact with the Samaritans? with the Ethiopian eunuch?
3. How do you think Philip explained 'the good news about Jesus' to the eunuch? What other Messianic Scriptures might he have used in addition to Isaiah 53:7, 8?
4. How did God orchestrate the spread of the gospel at this time in church history?

Application.

1. Pastor Ashwin said that the people groups and diverse ethnicities have not accidentally moved to Canada, but our Sovereign God orchestrated the entire global immigration process. What is your reaction to this statement?
2. Identify the gaps and prejudices that keep you from interacting with immigrants.
3. What part of the story of Philip and the eunuch speaks to you concerning your involvement with global immigration? How might the Spirit be telling you /your family/your group to partner with God to help bridge the gap?

Bibliography

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/august-web-only/non-christians-who-dont-know-christians.html>).

The Externally Focused Life, Eric Swanson and Rick Rusaw (LifeBridge Christian Church 2009)

THE WORD (NIV)

Acts 8:4-8

⁴Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. ⁵Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. ⁶When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸So there was great joy in that city.

Acts 8:26-40

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^[a] eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "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.

³²This 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.

³³In 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. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" ³⁷³⁸ And 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.

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Philip was in the midst of a revival in Samaria. The entire city responded to the preaching of the gospel. Suddenly, God called Philip to leave that area and go to the desert road leading to Gaza. Philip might have wondered if he was hearing God's voice, but he obeyed and went. If the Spirit were to whisper in our ears, would we be sensitive and respond in obedience?

There was one person travelling on that road, an Ethiopian eunuch, a high official in charge of the treasury of Queen Candace. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship. But Moses' law forbade eunuchs from entering the assembly of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23: 1). Though disappointed and rejected, he still picked up a holy book, the Book of Isaiah, and was reading it aloud on his return trip to Ethiopia. The Spirit told Philip to go close to the chariot.

When we take the initiative to come close where we can actually see and hear the person, we will be surprised to know they are searching for a relationship with God.

The Ethiopian didn't understand what he was reading, and invited Philip to come and sit with him. Philip was able to use this passage and share the good news about Jesus. This is called a breakthrough moment in evangelism, when non-Christians trust us and feel comfortable enough to invite us to enter into their lives.

God had prepared the heart of the Ethiopian even before he met Philip. The man could not have picked a better passage of Scripture than Isaiah 53, one of the clearest depictions of the death of Jesus. It was like an eye witness account but was written centuries before Jesus was born. The Ethiopian became a baptized believer, and went home rejoicing. He went on to be a missionary to his own people and the gospel permeated into the Great Continent of Africa.

As amazing is the conversion of this Ethiopian, what is even more amazing is Philip's conversion. Philip was an Orthodox Jew, and Jews hated Samaritans who were half Jew and half foreigners. Yet Philip preached to them. And then he faced a greater challenge, giving the gospel to a foreigner, a man with dark skin, sexually altered, and considered outside the covenant of God's people.

Yet Philip understood that Jesus broke all barriers. He was the first missionary in the New Testament to reach out and bridge the gap to people outside his culture. As a result, many Africans came to know the Lord because of Philip's obedience to God.

This story has a modern-day application. The Lord is orchestrating a global immigration of people groups who are making Canada their new home. A church cannot remain true to its calling and remain a silent church. We are called to partner with God in reaching out to new immigrants in love. Whenever our lives intersect with another person's life, we need to be sensitive and obedient to God's promptings. In this way we will fulfill the Great Commission of making disciples of all nations in our own backyard.

The Lord is passionately seeking people who will follow His call and become ambassadors of the gospel, going out of our comfort zone and extending friendship to the immigrants of other faiths who live in our city! It's time to bridge the gap so that many will come to the saving knowledge of Christ!