



STORIES **AND** RITUALS

LESSON 33

Stories & Rituals: The Bible in Broad Strokes

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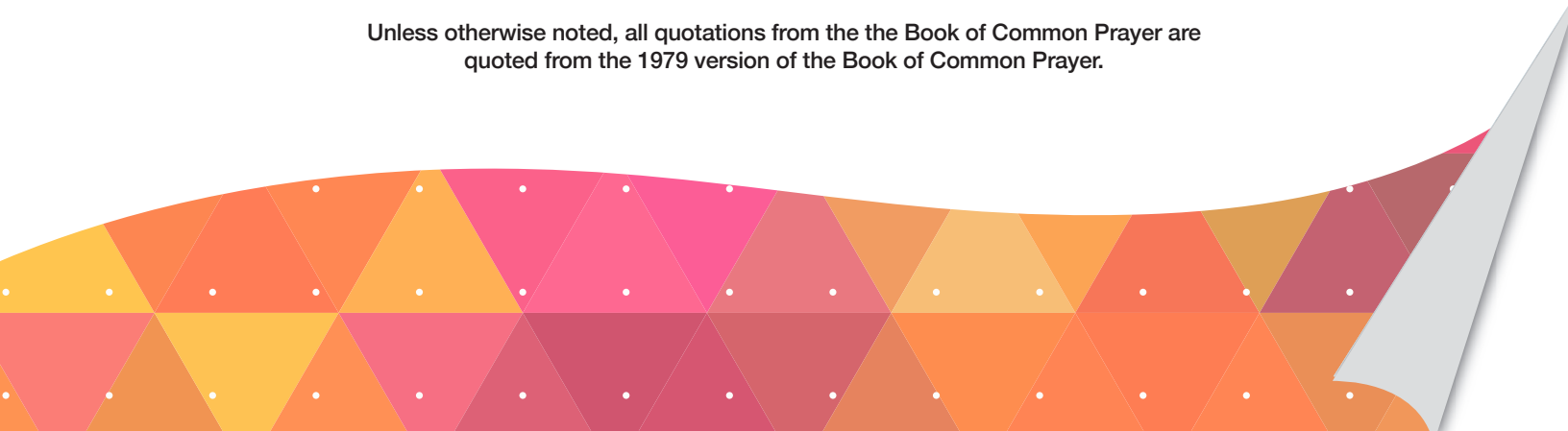
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Philip Baptizes an Ethiopian

Texts: Acts 8:26-40

Big Idea: We baptize and nurture new believers.

Lesson Objectives

Participants will:

1. Discuss how we can share our beliefs and values with others by playing a game.
2. Recognize that we baptize and nurture new believers by engaging in a re-telling of the story of Philip and the Ethiopian.
3. Illustrate a commitment to living out the promises of the Baptismal Covenant by engaging in a prayer ritual.

ACTIVITY (TIME)

Dive In (10 minutes)
Group Check-In

Community Builder (15 minutes)
What We Value

The Story (15 minutes)
Philip Baptizes an Ethiopian

The Ritual (15 minutes)
Baptism

Dig Deeper (10 minutes)
Living the Baptismal Covenant

Wrap it Up (5 minutes)
Closing Prayer

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Nothing

- Nothing

- Copy of Lesson Sheet 33.1

- Soft, instrumental music (optional)
- Method for playing music (optional)
- Candle • Lighter
- Copies of Baptismal Covenant (or promises)
- Large jug or bowl of water

- Copies of Baptismal Covenant (or promises)

- Nothing

LESSON OVERVIEW



What's the Story?

Today your group will hear the story Philip baptizing an Ethiopian eunuch, as told in Acts 8:26-40. Philip was an evangelist and, along with others, preached the gospel and the story of Jesus to people throughout the world.

Philip encounters an Ethiopian man while traveling on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. This man, known as a eunuch, served as an official to Candace, the queen. A eunuch typically served as officials in royal courts, and most likely this man was incapable of producing any children. Philip notices the Ethiopian reading from the prophet Isaiah, and upon asking the man about what he is reading, proceeds to help the eunuch understand how the prophecies tell the gospel of Jesus.

While they continue to travel, the Ethiopian spots a place with some water. Then, the Ethiopian asks Philip to baptize him. Although it seems as though this man believes in God, it is through Philip's teaching that he comes to recognize the love and power of Jesus, and is made a believer. After his baptism, the Ethiopian is filled with joy, and Philip continues to preach the good news throughout the region.



What's the "Big Idea?"

Today's lesson focuses on the big idea that *we baptize and nurture new believers*. It is through Philip's teaching that the Ethiopian man comes to understand Jesus and the power of his gospel. Then, Philip baptizes the man, who is filled with joy, proclaiming the good news of God's love. Each time a person is baptized, we make a commitment to nurture them in faith and in life. When we renew our baptismal vows, we re-commit ourselves to teaching others the gospel. We do this because, as Christians, we are called to proclaim the good news to all people. We are called to evangelize to others.



What's the Symbol?

Baptism is one of the sacraments of the church. In today's story, the Ethiopian man desires to be baptized after he and Philip approach a body of water. Find a large jug or cylinder that you can fill with water. A large bowl would work, too. If possible, engage in this lesson around your church's baptismal font.



What's the Ritual?

Today's ritual will invite participants to think about the sacrament of Baptism and the promises that are connected to it. Together, the group will read through the promises made at the time of a person's baptism. Then, the group will engage in a short ritual that re-commits them to helping others understand the meaning of these promises, too.



Setting Up Your Space

Set up your "altar" area. Cover a large table with a piece of fabric or linen. On the altar place some candles and a large cross. Fill a large jug, cylinder, or bowl with water, and place it in a central location where everyone can see and approach it (this can be on your altar or in another area). Gather materials needed for the Ritual and Dig Deeper activity.

DIVE IN (10 MINUTES)

Group Check-In

Materials:

- Nothing

During the session:

- Open your session with a quick prayer. Use this one or a prayer of your own:
Holy Lord, open our eyes, ears, and hearts to see your love and faithfulness in the world around us. Help us see your love for us in your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.
- Let's start our time together by sharing some of the great and not-so-great things that have happened to us this week. What were the high points and low points of your week? Go around the group and invite everyone to share.

COMMUNITY BUILDER (15 MINUTES)

What We Value

Materials:

- Nothing

NOTE: If members of your group don't have anything in their pockets (or even a wallet or purse) invite them to think about one thing they value, that is typically carried with them to school, work, or church.

During the session:

- Today we are going to start by emptying our pockets. What is something you value that you carry with you, wherever you go? If you have a backpack or purse, you can look through that, too. If you don't have anything on you, then think about one thing that you might carry with you somewhere.
- Give participants a minute to find their objects. Then, ask them to sit with a partner.
- Now, we are going to share with our partners why these objects are important to us. Pick one person to go first. This person will have twenty seconds to talk about their object. Partners, make sure you are listening! Ready? Go!
- Allow about twenty seconds for partners to share. Once time is up, capture the attention of the group.
- Okay, partners. Remember what you were just told. You'll need to remember that in a minute. Now, switch places so that the person who hasn't shared gets a turn. Once again, you will have twenty seconds to talk about your object. Ready? Go!
- Allow about twenty seconds for partners to share. Once time is up, capture the attention of the group.
- Okay, by now everyone has been given a chance to share. Now, I want you to switch objects with your partner, so you have each other's item. Allow participants time to switch

COMMUNITY BUILDER - CONTINUED

- **In a moment, you will find a different person to be your partner. Once you find your partner, you will have twenty seconds to tell them about this new object, and why it is valuable to the person who owns it. Ready? Find a partner!**
- Invite participants to find a new partner. Once everyone has found a partner, ask for one person to share their object. Give twenty seconds for the person to share.
- After twenty seconds are up, have partners switch places, and give another twenty seconds for the second person to share their item.

After everyone has shared, ask participants to return their objects to their original owners. Ask for several volunteers in the group to share what their object was, and why they picked it.

- Discuss the following questions:
- **Was it easy or hard for you to tell your first partner about your original object? Why?** *[Answers will vary.]*
- **After you switched objects with your partner, was it easy or hard for you to explain the item to someone new? Why?** *[Answers will vary.]*
- **Has there ever been a time in your life when you have told someone about something you value? About what did you tell them? What happened?** *[Answers will vary.]*
- **Has there ever been a time in your life when you have told someone about your faith? About what did you tell them? What happened?** *[Answers will vary.]*



THE STORY

(15 MINUTES)

Philip Baptizes an Ethiopian

Materials:

- Copy of Lesson Sheet 33.1

Before the session:

- Make a copy of Lesson Sheet 33.1
- Practice reading through the story several times so you are familiar with it.

During the session:

- Tell the story on Lesson Sheet 33.1
- After the story, ask: **What is this story telling us about God?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: God calls us to share the gospel with others, God reveals Godself to new believers through our teaching and our actions, God's love is for everyone, God is revealed to us through the people who teach us, etc.]*
- **What is this story telling us about humanity?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: We have a curiosity to learn new things, we all have beliefs and values that we teach to other people, we can influence others with our words and actions, we share our faith with new believers, etc.]*
- **What is this story telling us about the world?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: The world is filled with people who desire to know more about God, there are many places in the world where we can encounter and learn more about God, etc.]*
- **The Ethiopian man was curious about God, and wanted to learn more. Philip recognized this and helped the man understand the words of the prophets. In doing this, Philip was able to tell him about Jesus. Hearing this gospel changed the Ethiopian man, and eventually Philip baptized him! We also help others understand the gospel of Jesus in ways that nurture their faith, and might even make them new followers!**

THE RITUAL

(15 MINUTES)

Baptism

Materials:

- Soft, instrumental music (*optional*)
- Method for playing music (*optional*)
- Candle
- Lighter
- Copies of Baptismal Covenant
- Large jug or bowl of water

Before the session:

- Make copies of your church's baptismal liturgy for each participant. For us in the Episcopal tradition, this includes the Baptismal Covenant in the Book of Common Prayer. If your church identifies with another tradition, make copies of the promises made by your community at the time of a person's baptism.
- Place your large jug or bowl of water in a location that is easily accessible to all members of your group.

During the session:

- If you are playing music, begin playing it softly. Light any candles on your altar area.
- **When a person is baptized, the parents, godparents, certain promises are made. These promises commit the person being baptized, as well as the whole faith community, to continually studying Scripture, engaging in fellowship, and working for justice and peace on earth. Let's look specifically at some of these promises.**
- Hand each person a copy of the Baptismal Covenant.
- **Let's read through the promises of the Baptismal Covenant together. After each promise, we will stop for a moment of silence. During this moment of silence, I want you to think about why we might make this promise.**
- As a group, read aloud each promise of the Baptismal Covenant. Pause for reflection between each promise.
- **Each of these promises is a commitment. We commit ourselves to loving God and loving other people. We also commit ourselves to helping others understand what it means to love God and love other people, too.**
- **Why do you think it's important for us to make these promises, and to commit ourselves to living them?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: they help us focus on God, they help us focus on other people, the promises help us learn about what it means to follow God, etc.]*
- **Why do you think we make these promises (or why are these promises made for us) at the time of our baptism?** *[Answers will vary. Guide discussion so that the group understands that the promises of the Baptismal Covenant give us some ideas as to how we can be followers of God and God's teaching.]*
- Invite participants to gather around the jug or bowl of water.
- **In a moment, I will invite each of you to approach the water. Touch your fingers in the water. Then, use the water to make a cross on your forehead. As you make the cross, say a silent prayer to God, asking God to help you remember and live the promises of the Baptismal Covenant.**
- Invite participants to engage in the prayer ritual, one at a time.
- After everyone has made the cross on their forehead, close your time together with prayer. *Use the following, or pray your own prayer:* **Holy God, we thank you for the gift of baptism. We thank you for the promises you make to us. Help us remember to live out the promises in our Baptismal Covenant, so that others can know and understand your love. Amen.**

DIG DEEPER

(10 MINUTES)

Living the Baptismal Covenant

Materials:

- Copies of the Baptismal Covenant

Before the session:

- Make copies of your church's baptismal liturgy for each participant. For us in the Episcopal tradition, this includes the Baptismal Covenant in the Book of Common Prayer. If your church identifies with another tradition, make copies of the promises made by your community at the time of a person's baptism.

During the session:

- Split participants into small groups of three or four each.
- **Today we have considered the promises of the Baptismal Covenant, and how we might commit ourselves to living them out in our everyday lives. In today's story, Philip is able to tell the Ethiopian the good news about Jesus by teaching him. This is one example of how living out the promises of the Baptismal Covenant helps us nurture new believers.**
- Give each group a copy of the Baptismal Covenant. Assign each group one of the promises of the Covenant.
- **Work with your group to create a short skit (no more than a minute or two) that illustrates how you can live out your assigned promise in a way that shows others the good news of God's love.**
- Allow groups time to create and practice their skits.
- After 5-10 minutes, bring the group back together. Invite small groups to share their skits.

WRAP IT UP

(5 MINUTES)

Closing Prayer

Invite the group to share any prayer concerns or requests they may have for the week. Close your time together in prayer. Use the following or pray your own prayer:

Lord God, we thank you that, through the waters of baptism and the presence of the Holy Spirit, you have given us forgiveness of sin and welcome us into living lives of grace and love. Give us the courage to live out our baptismal promises and help others know your grace and love, too. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Lesson Sheet 33.1

Philip Baptizes an Ethiopian

A story from the book of Acts:

One day, an angel of God spoke to Philip. The angel said, “Take the road, the desert road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza.” So, Philip got up and took the road. While he was walking, Philip saw an Ethiopian, a eunuch. The Ethiopian man served the Queen Candace by overseeing the country’s treasury. The man had traveled to Jerusalem for worship and was traveling home. He was sitting in his chariot, reading a scroll of the Prophet Isaiah.

Philip heard the Spirit say, “Go to the chariot.” So, Philip walked up to the man.

Philip asked the Ethiopian, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The Ethiopian replied, “How can I really understand it, unless you explain it to me?” He invited Philip to sit in the chariot next to him. Philip sat down and read the scroll. It said,

*“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
And like a lamb silent before its shearer,
So he does not open his mouth.
In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth.”*

The Ethiopian asked Philip, “About whom is this passage speaking? Is the prophet talking about himself, or someone else?” Philip responded to the question by telling the man all about Jesus, especially what the prophets wrote about him.

As they traveled down the road, Philip and the Ethiopian came to some water. The Ethiopian said to Philip, “Look, there’s water! Is there anything else that can keep me from being baptized?” The man asked the chariot to stop. Philip and the Ethiopian both walked to the water, where Philip baptized him.

When the Ethiopian man came up out of the water, he saw God’s Spirit take Philip away. The man got up and continued on his way home, rejoicing for all that he experienced. Philip continued to travel around the region, proclaiming the good news to everyone he met.