



## Discussion Guide

Date: 7/13/2025

Sermon Title: Who is welcome here?

Scripture: Acts 8:26-31, 36-39

This discussion guide is a layout to be used with a group or class. We have included opening and closing prayers to start and end your group. The guide may be used for personal or family reflection as well.

### OPENING PRAYER

*Gracious God, You journey with us through deserts and detours, and You surprise us again and again with your inclusive grace. As we gather today, open our hearts to hear Your Word in fresh ways. May we be transformed by the witness of Philip and the Ethiopian traveler, and may Your Spirit lead us into deeper welcome, wider love, and faithful action. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

### Opening Question:

1. Have you been on any journeys or road trips this summer? If so, where? If not, where would you like to go?

### Digging into the Word:

1. Read Acts 8:26-31, 36-39 as a group. It may be helpful to ask two readers to share (one as Philip, one as narrator). What word, phrase, or image stood out to you from this story?
2. Have you ever had a "divine detour" like Philip—an unexpected encounter that ended up being transformative?
3. The Ethiopian eunuch represents someone doubly marginalized in his context—by ethnicity and physical status. Why is his inclusion in baptism significant for the early church?
4. In verse 31, the eunuch asks, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" What does this tell us about the importance of faithful witnesses and teaching in our journeys of faith?
5. In verse 36, the eunuch asks, "What is to prevent me from being baptized?" How would you answer that question? What barriers do churches today (intentionally or unintentionally) put in front of people seeking inclusion? What does this reveal about the nature of God's grace and the inclusivity of the gospel message?
6. Philip doesn't hesitate. He affirms that nothing prevents this man from receiving the grace of baptism. How does this reflect God's ever-expanding welcome? Where have you seen God expanding your understanding of who belongs?

### Going Deeper:

7. Read Galatians 3:28 (NRSV) – "There is no longer Jew or Greek..." How does Paul's vision of equality in Christ align with what we see in Acts 8?
8. Read Isaiah 56:3–5 (NRSV), a prophecy that includes eunuchs among God's people. How might the Ethiopian eunuch have read or heard these words? What does it say about God's long-standing desire to include those who were once excluded?

### **Wesleyan Insight:**

John Wesley wrote, "All the world is my parish." This was not just about preaching in many places—it was a theological statement that the grace of God knows no borders or categories. Reflect on this quote from Methodist scholar Randy Maddox: "Wesley's theology of grace is fundamentally inclusive: it begins with God's universal love and seeks the transformation of all creation." (Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*, 1994)

9. How can our church become more intentionally inclusive—more like Philip than the gatekeepers of exclusion?

### **Sermon Questions:**

10. Pastor Allison talks about how far the Ethiopian eunuch had to travel to get to Jerusalem to ultimately not be able to fully participate, he was excluded. How might our expectations of inclusion and exclusion in religious communities today compare to those experienced by the Ethiopian eunuch? What can we learn from his persistence in seeking God despite facing barriers?
11. In what ways does Philip's willingness to step outside his assigned role challenge our own understanding of service and ministry? How can we be more open to God's surprising calls in our lives?
12. Imagine the eunuch who has given all he had in service and was still rejected and excluded learns through reading Isaiah with Phillip that he was welcome fully. What emotions and feelings do you think flooded into this eunuch's life?
13. How does the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch demonstrate the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing people together across boundaries? Where do you see the Spirit working similarly today?

### **Applying it:**

14. The sermon mentions that many people feel unqualified to share their faith. Do you ever feel this way? What might help you overcome this hesitation?
15. How does the story of Philip and the Ethiopian challenge our assumptions about who can share the gospel and who is worthy to receive it?

### **CLOSING PRAYER**

*Loving God, You break down the walls we build and widen the circles of belonging. Thank You for including us in Your story of grace. Send us out to be like Philip—ready to listen, to teach, and to baptize all who long to know You. May our church be a place where no one needs to ask, "What is to prevent me?"—because the answer will always be, "Nothing at all." In the name of Jesus, the One who welcomes all, Amen.*

### **WAYS TO RESPOND (or challenges for you this week)**

1. This week, look for opportunities to welcome or include someone who might feel marginalized in your church or community.



2. Reflect on your own spiritual gifts. How might God be calling you to use them in unexpected ways?