



Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

—Proverbs 18:10

The Life of Philip

When I think of the characters in the book of Acts, I think of Peter, Paul, John, Luke, and Timothy. But there is much to learn from some of the “minor” characters. Philip is one such character.

There are a handful of Philips in the Bible. There are two Herod Philips (Mark 3:1, 6:17). There is the city of Philippi, founded by Philip Macedon. And there is the apostle Philip (John 1:43–49).

The Philip who appears in Acts was none of those things—he was not a military conqueror, not a Roman official, not one of Jesus’ inner circle of disciples who saw His resurrection. But he is one who used his talents to the fullest in the service of Jesus Christ, and stands as a shining example of faith to all of us today.

Philip the Servant (Acts 6:1–6)

We first meet Philip in Acts 6:1–6. A group of widows was being overlooked in the daily serving of food, and the leaders of the church directed that seven men be selected from the brethren who could be put in charge of this mundane but important task. Philip was one of these men.

Lake Wales
Church of Christ
463 N. Buck Moore Rd.
Lake Wales, FL 33898
www.lakewalescoc.com
(863) 676-4114

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The noun *diakonos* “deacon” is not used here, but a related noun *diakonia* “ministry” is used, as well as the verb *diakoneo* “serve.” It’s pretty clear that even if these men weren’t given the title of deacons, they did the same sort of work. We can see that while their work may not have been glamorous, and may not have been the same as the teaching function of the leaders, it was absolutely essential. Philip was a man of humility, happy to wash feet. His service allowed the leaders to focus their attention on “prayer and the ministry of the word,” the job that God Himself had given them. It is not “fitting” (the meaning of the Greek word *aristos* in verse 2) for teachers and leaders to neglect their spiritual work to mop floors and organize rides. Philip’s service allowed all the work of the church to move forward.

In the early church, as well as in Paul’s later letter to Timothy, there were necessary qualities for being entrusted with that kind of duty. Philip and the other six were “men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom ... full of faith.” It takes faithful men, busy men, capable men, self-starting and self-controlled men to have responsibility over these areas. Men of character who can be counted on. Without their work, the church could not function smoothly. And when they take care of the tasks assigned to them, 1 Tim. 3:13 says, “those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

Philip was just such a man. And it strikes me that perhaps his days as a servant helped prepare him for greater works in the years ahead.

Philip the Teacher (Acts 8:4–13)

In Acts 7, a man named Saul caused a great persecution, and scattered the members of the Jerusalem church. Each of those members planted himself like a seed in his new community, and began to grow. “Philip went down to the city of Samaria and began proclaiming Christ to them” (Acts 8:5).

What a man of courage! He had been driven out of his home by persecution. He had watched one of his six fellow workers, Stephen, be stoned to death for his vocal faith. Rather than do what we might be

tempted to do—lay low and mind our own business for a while—Philip immediately began speaking out in the name of Jesus.

After all, the Apostles were not around, having remained in Jerusalem. It fell to men like Philip to rise to the challenge as leaders and teachers in their own communities and congregations, and begin to teach the truth.

Why do any of us wait? The preacher and the elders do not need to be at your shoulder. Why not this very week reach out to your neighbor, your friend, your cousin, your co-worker, with the good news of the gospel? Invite them to worship. Invite them to hear. Explain the reason for the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15). Don't be scared, for Philip's boldness allowed him to convert many in the city, including the most famous man in town, Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9–13).

Philip the Evangelist (Acts 8:26–40)

Soon, Philip was given a new task. I suggest this marks a subtle shift in his work. In Samaria, he simply acted faithfully where he found himself. But in Acts 8:26, God actually appointed him to carry the gospel to new lands. “An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, ‘Get up, and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ ” There, he met a court official of Ethiopia who was reading the prophet Isaiah. Philip introduced himself, skillfully used the passage in Isaiah to explain the gospel, and baptized him. We can only guess, but I like to think that Philip's work started the evangelization of Egypt, Ethiopia, and all of northern Africa, as the newly-saved eunuch brought back the gospel with him.

And the eunuch wasn't Philip's only encounter. Acts 8:40 says that, as Philip made his way back north from Azotus (ancient Ashdod), “he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea,” a large city on the shore of the Mediterranean.

The Lord needs more men who have the same “where-He-leads-I'll-follow” attitude. Who spend the requisite time mastering the Bible, so that they can go out soldiers, pushing the gospel into new lands. Who think of preaching not as a life of convenience, who do not search for “a

good congregation,” settling behind the protection of a wooden pulpit, but who think of preaching as a life of service wherever God should lead. Philip was a man who made himself completely available to God, who sacrificed in order to preach the gospel where it was needed most.

Philip the Father (Acts 21:8–9)

I have saved the best for last. Luke says the least about this part of Philip’s life. Nevertheless, if you were able to travel back in time and ask Philip, I am willing to bet that this was the part that gave him the greatest sense of pride and satisfaction. It is Philip in his role as a father to four children!

Luke says in Acts 21:8–9, “we [Paul, Luke, and their many companions] left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.”

Last we saw Philip in Acts 8:40, he ended his journey in Caesarea. It would seem that, for the next 25 years, Philip remained in Caesarea, sinking down roots and raising his family, preaching the gospel. And while reaching out to the community, he reached out to his own family.

Much can be speculated about “virgin daughters who were prophets,” but it’s safe to say that the girls were committed to righteousness in the midst of a sinful Greco-Roman society, and that they were busy and useful to the Lord in spreading the truth.

Let us never forget that the most important mission field is our own kitchen table. Let’s be sure that we give our efforts to making sure that we save our own children, and give them the foundation they need to pass on the faith to their own children as well, so that when Jesus returns, the whole family will share a legacy of faith. —*John Guzzetta*

Quote of the Week:

“A serious error made by parents is to commit the spiritual development of their children to a few minutes of Sunday morning Bible classes for which neither the teachers nor the children have made any serious preparation.” —*Homer Hailey, The Great Commission, p. 134*