

**“The God Over our Streets”
Acts 8:1-40**

Introduction: Pg. 916

This morning we're going to have a Pop Quiz (I wanted to celebrate all the wonderful graduations with the start of summer school! :))

Pull out your Block Map. *The Art of Neighboring (Hold up Copy - Resource)*

Think about eight of your closest neighbors. Doesn't have to be perfectly geographical or according to the orientation on your handout.

This quiz reveals your proficiency with what I'm going to call the **Three Levels of Neighboring**.

- 1. Their Name.** (This means they are **No Longer a Stranger** to you)
- 2. Simple Information** you've gathered from conversation: Family info, Work, Where they're from, etc. (**No Longer a Stranger to Acquaintance**)
- 3. Below the surface.** What are their hopes and dreams? What challenges do they face? What do they think about social or spiritual issues? (**Acquaintance to Relationship**)

How did you do?!

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The authors say they've found: about 10% of people know the names of all eight of their neighbors (level 1), about 3% know basic info (Level 2), and < 1% hit Level 3.

Sadly, most of us do not know our neighbors. But when Jesus gave us the 2nd Greatest Commandment to: "Love... your neighbor as yourself." (Luke 10:23), that includes our *actual neighbors*.

So as we jump back into the Book of Acts, we are going to take a few weeks to think very specifically about what it looks like to take ownership of Our Streets and represent Jesus in our neighborhoods.

In Acts 8-11, we find the message of Jesus breaking into new areas. Though these chapters were not written as a manual for us to be missional neighbors, they were most certainly handed down to instruct us on how we can take the message of Jesus wherever he places us, including the very streets we call home.

And what better time of the year to get this in perspective? New England is coming alive. Neighbors are working in the yard, firing up the grill, going to the park, and exercising again (walking, running, biking).

It's time for us to level up our love, to move from the 90, to the 10, to the 3, to the less than 1%. It will take time, and most importantly, it will take the truth and grace of God.

Acts 8 is going to help us learn how we can...

The Point: Level up your love by living under the God over your streets.

[Read Acts 8:1-40]

You can....

I. Level up your love by recognizing God is over your address.

God is sovereign (in control) over where he sends us.

As the message of Jesus was rapidly advancing, so was persecution against the church. It hit a tipping point with the stoning of Stephen (in Acts 7), which ignited greater persecution and more imprisonments against Christians in Jerusalem.

This could have silenced the church, but it actually helped SPREAD the mission Jesus gave his followers to "be my [his] witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

Verse 4 says "those who were scattered went about preaching the word."

What does this teach us? God works behind the scenes in ways we cannot see. We call this God's providence.

- **"God from eternity, decrees or permits all things that come to pass, and perpetually upholds, directs and governs all creatures and all events; yet so as not in any way to be the author or approver of sin nor to destroy the free will and responsibility of intelligent creatures (Isa. 46:9-11; Prov. 16:33; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3; Jas. 1:13-15)." (RHC Statement of Faith)**
- Nothing happens in our lives that God's hand did not orchestrate or allow. We see this in the cross of Christ as God took the worst evil (men killing God) to accomplish the greatest good (God saving man).

Do you see how God used these moments of persecution to accomplish his purposes?

- The persecuted Christians scattered exactly where God wanted to send them so that more people could believe in Jesus.
- [As Tertullian said in the 2nd century: "The blood of the martyr's is the seed of the church."]
- One of the key communicators of the message of Jesus and demonstrators of the power of Jesus (as he cast out evil spirits and miraculously healed people, was a man named Philip.
- God placed Phillip in Samaria.

Where has God placed you? What's your address?

- God is over your address as much as he was over sending Phillip to Samaria.
- **Acts 17:26-27** makes this explicit: **"And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, *having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.*"**

- It doesn't matter if you found your apartment on Craigslist or your family has lived on the same street for 85 years, God's providence is over where he has placed you and where he has placed your neighbors!
- And his design is to grab our people's attention that we might discover who he is!

Don't miss the obvious. Satan loves to (in the words of CS Lewis) "Aggravate that most useful human characteristic, the horror and neglect of the obvious." (*Screwtape*)

T: God has placed YOU - THERE - To LOVE THEM. Understanding that is the beginning of leveling up our love for our neighbors. #2.

II. Level up your love by understanding your neighbors' unique stories.

Every one of your neighbors has a unique story. We see two very different people highlighted in chapter 8: Simon the magician and the Ethiopian Eunuch.

- Simon
 - Profile (9-11)
 - Simon was an accomplished magician. He was influential and probably wealthy.
 - Note in verse 10, it says, "they all paid attention to him." (Same word in verse 6).
 - The battle for the human heart is a battle of attention. - We'll see this again in 16:14 with Lydia when it says: "The Lord opened her heart to *pay attention* to what was said [by Paul.]"
 - Simon was so accomplished that people believed he had/was "the power of God that is called Great."
 - But we have a shift in verses 12-13...
 - How the Gospel changed him. (10-24)
 - Verse 13. "Even Simon believed as Philip preached about the kingdom of God and name of Jesus. AND Simon was baptized."
 - An initial reading of the text seems to indicate that Simon was sincere in his belief, BUT he quickly got caught up in his old ways.
 - When he saw the power of the Spirit on display, both in the signs of Philip and especially when Peter and John laid their hands on the people and they received the Spirit (in a sort of Samaritan Pentecost), he wanted that power too.
 - So much so that he offered them money so that he could confer the Spirit's power on people, but he soon learned he could not manipulate God. God cannot be bought.
 - This brings a sharp rebuke from Peter (Verse 20-23)
 - And Simon seems to fear the judgment of God and asks Peter to pray for him.
 - We cannot be certain if Simon possessed sincere faith, but Simon's story teaches us that the gospel is more powerful than magic or any other human pursuit and the gospel must be accepted and obeyed.

- Ethiopian
 - Profile (27-28)
 - He was another influential person. He worked for the Queen of Ethiopia.
 - He was good with finances (in charge of the queen's treasure).
 - And he was seeking after God. He came to Jerusalem to worship and went home with the Hebrew Scriptures to continue learning about God.
 - How the Gospel changed him. (29-39)
 - In the place of his searching, God searched him out by sending Philip to him to explain what he was reading.
 - Very quickly, he believed the gospel, which was confirmed by his desire to be baptized.
- Do you see how the church is fulfilling Jesus' command to take his message to Samaria and with the Ethiopian, a preview of the gospel going "to the ends of the earth."?

And what do we learn? People have unique stories, and are open to varying degrees in their spiritual journey.

- We love them all, and yet, we can unapologetically pray for God to lead us to people like the Ethiopian eunuch.
- The Eunuch was reading Isaiah 53, arguably the clearest chapter in the OT foretelling the good news about Jesus' life, death and resurrection!!
- But listen! We will not even know how open people are until we actually get to know them!!
- I know your neighbors, like mine, range from ultra-relational to ultra-reclusive. I get it.
- BUT Make yourself available.

Three encouragements to **Level up your love**.

1. **Pray.** Take prayer walks around your neighborhood... Use them as opportunities to get to know your neighbors. Keep your Block Map visible and pray for your neighbors by name.
2. **Play.** "Do what you do, do it with others; do what others do, do it with them." Eat. Meals. Cookouts. Yard Games. Kids Playing together.
3. **Serve & Be Served.**
 - See a need, meet a need. Help with some yard work. Provide a meal during difficult times. Have people in your home!
 - Jeff Vanderstelt says: "I think the church has been taught to idolize their home, their family and themselves. The rampant individualistic approach says: "but that's my house." No, that's God's house."
 - But also... be served. Ask for help. Borrow a tool. Ask for some eggs (instead of taking an hour to go to the grocery). Relationships go deeper when we extend time and help to one another.

T: Get to know their unique stories... and

III. Level up your love by hearing the voice of God.

First and foremost, you have Philip being obedient to the teaching of Jesus. Wherever he went, he was telling people about Jesus. That's exactly what Jesus told him (AND US) to do.

So we hear the voice of God through the Scriptures.

- This is why we draw a circle (revival starts with me) and get our face in God's book! Did you do that? Did God's life-giving Word bring you life this week?
- But we also hear the voice of God...

through his moment by moment leadership.

- For Philip, this came in a unique and atypical way in *verse 26*. Angel. They still exist. They are still accomplishing God's work.
- But then the more typical way is through the direction of the Holy Spirit in *verse 29*.
 - This is part of the fulfillment of Acts 1:8.
 - **Romans 8:14** - **"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."** ("Don't go there. Don't do that. Go speak to them. Ahemmm... Go speak to them right now. Grab lunch with them tomorrow.")
 - We don't know if these were audible words or inaudible, but we know the Spirit still prompts and guides us in a variety of ways, but
 -
 - Hear me, especially if this makes you nervous... Never in contradiction to the Scripture!

If you doubt this - Why pray? Why pray for wisdom, if we don't expect God to tap us on the shoulder and speak to us by his Spirit.

I hope you see how this works.

- On the one hand, the entirety of our lives are lived under the providence of God.
- On the other hand, there are those supernatural moments of his leadership.
- We could call them Foundation of God's providential leadership AND Flashes of his supernatural guidance.
- Your life as a whole (<.....>) and the 1000s moments (!!!!!!) God is saying: "Them. Now. That. Tomorrow."
- Expect the flashes. This is a dynamic relationship. The Good Shepherd still speak to his sheep!
- You say, I'm not experiencing many Phillip moments. Here are a few helps...
 - When you pray and read the Word, who pops into your mind?
 - Who is coming to you for help?
 - Who do you keep bumping into? (Have a friend from the Middle East, I run into everywhere! He named his kid "Isa!" (That's Jesus!) — God has to grab our attention to get their attention!)

Here's **the Principle: God is working ahead of us!** It's not all on us. It never has been, never will be!
Providence creates confidence!

And here's **our Prayer: God send me where you're working.**

T: Live with the constant attitude: "Why not them?"

IV. Level up your love by pointing your actual neighbors to life in Christ.

The whole point of this chapter is that God wants us to love our neighbors with his love, not just by our actions, but also with words about Jesus!

"Relational evangelism is NOT evangelism at all until the Word of God enters that relationship." (Helm)

The centrality of the Word!

- Verse 4. "Those who were scattered" = "the church." Not just the leaders. The mission is in OUR hands and we need to take it to OUR streets.
- The message never changes. Look at *verse 12*... Philip "preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ."
 - Jesus is the only way. The Samaritans needed to believe in this Messiah.
 - The Ethiopian needed to be saved through faith in Jesus.
 - It's not enough that people are moral or even "religious."
 - Maybe that's you, today! Trust Jesus to forgive you and give you new life!
- The mission never changes...
 - Verse 25. Apostles... preaching to many villages (wherever they went).
 - Verse 40. Same with Philip - preaching "to all the towns."

Wow!

- You say, "that was them." Why not us? Do we not have the same instruction from Jesus and the same Spirit in us?
- Prayer can get us back there. Surrender can get us back there. (Revived to see Revival. Fullness Overflowing!)
- I was speaking to one of the young ladies in our church who found herself down on her knees last week at the end of our service. I asked her how God spoke to her. She said: "I feel like God was telling me to seize every opportunity to advance the gospel." OK.
- Later that afternoon, she got a call from a friend she had been praying for the past two year. And what did she do? Told her about Jesus!

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- So let's learn a lesson from Philip here. We need to get the Bible in people's hands and be ready to help people in their journey. As simple as that.
- Here's a bible. I'd love for you to to read ____ (decide the section, chapter, book) and let me know what you think or what questions you have."

- We have Bibles available. Gospel of Luke/John

Conclusion:

And the ultimate prayer for our neighborhoods and our city is verse 8. "Much joy in that city" because Jesus was made known and received!