

God's Original Plan

by Jim Cymbala

The Holy Spirit is the key to the Christian church's growth, multiplication, and effectiveness in spreading the gospel, and He empowers believers to live a life that honors God.

Duration: 35:11

Scripture: Acts 6:1, Acts 8:35-36, Acts 8:38

Topics: "Plan"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the passage from the book of Acts where Philip shares the good news about Jesus with the Ethiopian eunuch and baptizes him. The preacher emphasizes the quick response and obedience of Philip in baptizing people. He then discusses the role of the Holy Spirit in the Christian church and how it can bring about a turnaround. The preacher also shares a personal story about a man in need and highlights the importance of being willing to help others without seeking personal recognition.

Transcript

In the history of the Christian church, especially in the last 200 years, the member of the Godhead, or Trinity, call it what you will, that has been mentioned the least, emphasized the least, taught about the least, is the Holy Spirit. And I'm gonna read to you from the book of Acts about what the Holy Spirit can do in just one life and a little bit about his purpose. Well, let's talk about his purpose first.

I'm gonna read from Acts. The book of Acts is many times called Acts of the Apostles, but it's not that at all. It's the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

Who is the Holy Spirit? Well, we know from the teaching of Scripture that the Father, God the Father, sent his Son. Famous verse, let's say it out loud together. For God so loved the world that he, his only Son, that whosoever believeth on him would not perish but have.

So Jesus came about 2,000 years ago. He lived about 33 1/2 years here. He taught, he did miracles, he gave attesting signs to prove who he was, the divine Son of God.

And then he was crucified on a tree, on a cross. He died for the sins of the world so that by confessing our sins and putting our faith in him, we might have full pardon from our sins and have a new beginning, a new life. Before he left, he talked about the fact and listened to the words carefully.

He said, when I go, I will send another helper. The word paraclete is an untranslatable word like hallelujah or a few other words that are so rich in their meaning, it's hard to define them with one English word. Helper, advocate have been used, counselor, but not counseling like we would think counseling.

He said this, I'm gonna send you another helper because I'm leaving. He has been with you, but now he will be in you. So let's just stop here so this reading of scripture will be noteworthy for us.

Jesus did his work, his sacrificial work, proving he was the Son of God by being raised from the dead. He went back to heaven. To replace him, he sent the Holy Spirit.

This is a stunning truth ignored by most of Christendom. The Holy Spirit was to replace Jesus on the earth. Everything that Jesus was to the individual believers and to the disciples, the Holy Spirit was now to become.

But in a greater way because Jesus was limited by one human body. When he was in Galilee, he couldn't be in Jerusalem. And he couldn't live inside of anyone.

He could only do what he was sent to do. So just like he led the disciples and was in charge of everything, he said now I'm gonna send the Holy Spirit and he'll replace me in charge of everything. He will administrate my church.

I'm building a church and I'm putting him in charge because I'm leaving. I won't come back again until I come back again. But while I'm gone, he will be in charge.

But he's invisible. He's everywhere at once, unlike the limitations that Jesus took on himself when he came from heaven to be the savior of the world. So the Holy Spirit now has been sent to be everything to us that Jesus was to disciples 2,000 years ago.

He never asked the disciples, hey guys, what do you feel like doing today? They looked to him and he said, we're going back to Nazareth. We're going to Nazareth. Why? The master said so.

We're staying here two weeks because Jesus said to do it. Now Jesus is gone. So the one who has replaced him, especially in charge of the church that Jesus formed by dying on the cross and putting us all together, the only one who's supposed to be in charge is not the pastor, is not a board, is not clever people, not interesting software that's brought into play, not corporate America thinking, not talented people.

God's not looking for talent. He's God. Why would he need talent? He can use talent, he can use people, but then again, he can use anybody.

The Holy Spirit is in charge and probably the cause of the decline in Christianity in our country is that the Holy Spirit has been displaced as the administrator, executive administrator of the Christian church. He is not consulted, he is not looked to, he is not asked to lead the matters at hand, whether it's a service or anything else. We have gotten smart and wise in our own thinking, so thus he is not consulted.

And this has grieved him because he was sent to be in charge. And when you don't include him in the mission that he was sent to do, this is a very grieving, hurtful thing to him. He was supposed to be a guide to the believers, just like Jesus was.

When the disciples had a problem, they could go to Jesus. What should I do and all of that? Well, now Jesus is not here, so who can we go to? We can look to the Holy Spirit, who's also called the Spirit of Christ. Holy Spirit, what should I do? Guide me, lead me.

Jesus, I can't understand this passage from Isaiah 53. Well, he's not here, you can't talk to him. So you can go to the Holy Spirit.

I have a problem, I don't understand Isaiah 53. And he will teach you exactly like the master taught the disciples 2,000 years ago. And as I'm saying this, it's staggering to some of us because we've never thought of it like that.

God can do nothing on planet Earth except through the Holy Spirit, because he's here. He was sent by Jesus, he's the other helper. In fact, Jesus said, greater things will be done now because I've been limited by being in my body.

I've come to sacrifice my life, but now when he comes, in fact, he said, it's good for you that I go. And they were going time out. It is not good for us that you're going.

You are our master, our rabbi, our teacher. He said, no, it's good for you that I go because unless I get out, he can't come. But when he comes, he's gonna glorify me and you're gonna receive a power you never had when I was here on Earth.

All in favor, clap your hands and say amen. Amen. Everything that Jesus was to the disciples, the Holy Spirit is to be to us now.

But these are not three gods. He's in the mystery of the Godhead. He is called the Spirit of Christ.

So when we say where two or three are gathered, the Lord is here, we don't mean the Lord as in the Lord who's in heaven. We mean he's here through the presence of the Holy Spirit. And I have felt him here today.

How many have felt him here today? I have. The plan of God through the Holy Spirit is very interesting. As we read through the book of Acts, we find out that all the Holy Spirit is looking for, according to the plan of God, are instruments that he can work through.

If you read the book of Acts right, the only hero is the Holy Spirit. Jesus' name, the Holy Spirit bringing the things of Christ to fruition. And you find out that all the Holy Spirit is looking for is he's not running a job search like who's really smart, I need some smart people.

In fact, it has been pointed out that the reason Jesus picked fishermen and tax collectors is that they would have no one else to depend on to be in charge of world missions for the Christian church but the Holy Spirit. Especially when you failed on the night he was arrested and like Peter, you denied him three times and cursed the last time and yet Jesus says, you preach the first sermon of the Christian era. How else could Peter pull it off except by saying, not by might, not by power but by your spirit, Lord.

Work through me because I am certainly not qualified or I don't merit this possibility but you've given it to me. So now, the book of Acts, if you're read that way, you're just looking for what's the Holy Spirit doing next? He empowers the church, the church forms, it's now multiplying and growing. So now watch, a man called Philip comes into play.

Acts 8, those who had been scattered, this is after Stephen had been martyred, the first Christian martyr, Acts 8. They preached the word wherever they went. These are all the believers. All the believers who were scattered due to the persecution, they preached the word wherever they went, not the apostles.

Now Philip, who was like a deacon, he went down to a city in Samaria and he proclaimed the Messiah there. And when the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.

So there was great joy in that city. We got a revival in that city. Now in the midst of all that great tumult and celebration, verses later, there's a change for God's plan for Philip.

Let's look. Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, go south. In other words, leave where everything is going so great.

Go south to the road, the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. So he started out and on his way he met an Ethiopian 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.

He must have been a convert to Judaism, although he was an African, an Ethiopian. And on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah, the prophet. The spirit told Philip exactly like Jesus would tell somebody something.

This is amazing language. He's not a force. You know, Star Wars, the force is with you.

He's not a force. He's not a ghost. Bad translation, King James.

He's a person as much as Jesus is a person. Only a person can speak. The Holy Spirit said how? We don't know.

The spirit told Philip, go to that chariot and stay near it. Then what? Nothing else, just go. Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah, the prophet.

Do you understand what you're reading, Philip asked. How can I, he said, unless someone explains it to me. So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

This is the passage of scripture the eunuch was reading. Quote, he was led like a sheep to the slaughter and as a lamb before its shearers is silent. So he did not open his mouth.

In his humiliation, he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth. The eunuch asked Philip, tell me, please.

Who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else? Then Philip began with that very passage of scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said to him, look, here is water.

What stands in the way of my being baptized? And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized them. Look how quickly they baptized people.

So what's some lessons for us today given this passage? Understanding that the book of Acts is about the acts of the Holy Spirit. How does the Spirit work? How are we gonna see a turnaround in the Christian church? There's less and less influence in our society now for the Christian message. That's a matter of fact.

There's great Christians, there's great churches. God is doing good things in different parts. But anyone who knows the statistics, seven churches are closing every day in America.

Some denominations are taking the money that they're using because they have to sell their buildings, trying to plant and start new churches. But it's rough sledding in many places in America. How are we gonna see a turnaround? We have to understand the purpose and work of the Holy Spirit.

Notice this. Notice that the person that this portion is talking about is Philip. Philip wasn't even an apostle or a pastor or a preacher.

He's mentioned in the book of Acts chapter six that when they had a problem in the church feeding widows for food, there was an argument, because even Christians can get into it sometimes, that the Grecian widows who spoke Greek and had those customs were maybe being left out and the Hebrew-speaking, Aramaic-speaking, more Jewish widows were getting the better food or a better allotment. So there was a problem and it had to be settled. And the disciples, the apostles said, look, get some guys.

There were seven of them. One was Stephen, one was Philip. Get them to hand out this food.

We want to give ourselves to prayer and preaching the word. And yet, with no title and no one laying hands on him for some great ministry, they're not even called deacons yet. This helper in the church takes off because the Holy Spirit comes on him.

And now the Holy Spirit uses him as an instrument and he ends up being scattered because of a persecution. He goes to Samaria. Now remember, the gospel had not come to the Samaritans yet.

They were, to the Jewish people, a half-breed people. We know from the book of Gospels, Jews hated the Samaritans and it was likewise on the Samaritans' part. But Jesus had said, go into all the world and preach the gospel in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and they had never gone there.

For some reason, their prejudice or their focus on Jerusalem, the gospel, as far as we know, had not gone to Samaria. But now a deacon, but not even a deacon. I don't wanna call him that.

He was handing out food. And he's being mightily used by God because God can use anybody he wants. What I wanna get at here is God is not looking for titles.

You don't need a title, I don't need a title. What we need is the power of the Holy Spirit. Come on, let's say amen to that.

That's all we need. We have now made it because we follow the course of this world. You need a PhD, you gotta have at least a master's.

How in the world can God use you without a PhD? In divinity or whatever. Do you think anybody out on Fulton Street is smoking weed all day long? Do you think when they get up and they're suicidal and their life is aimless, do you think any of them are saying, oh God, this morning, please send someone with a PhD to me to talk to me? Of course not. All humanity wants around the world, rich or poor, whatever color,

is someone who loves them, who's filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and can speak the word of God about Jesus to them.

That's all the world is looking for. Any man, any woman who loves others because of the Holy Spirit in them, who's empowered by the Holy Spirit and who knows the good things about Jesus and can share it, now that's a dynamo. That's a dynamo.

So I want you to notice this. It's like, let's say the Midwest Food Bank gave us 10,000 pounds of food and they send it here on these huge semis that come from Illinois, central Illinois. And we get it and we got, we gotta hand this out to the congregation.

People without a job, this one, that one. All right, so let's get some people. Let's get some men and women.

So come on, you three over there, you four, we know you, we'll pray for you. God, help them to do this because they're gonna need wisdom to hand out, make sure no fights break out or arguments and all of that. That's Philip.

One of those people to go and hand out the food. What I want to say to you is, this flies in the face of all superstar pastors, superstar evangelists, people with publicity, trying to give their name a brand effect. There are no brands in Christianity.

The only brand is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Let's say amen loud to that. So here's a guy.

Come on, you can be that guy, you can be that girl, that lady. I can be that person. What was his qualifications? We don't know.

How did he get converted? We don't know. He was just helping handing out food. But you can't keep a good man down.

You can't hold a good woman down. If God empowers somebody and they get a gift to be able to pray for let's say the sick and there's results, people are gonna go to that person. They don't care what the title is.

They want to be healed. And this is how the church was supposed to operate. We've made it spectators, performance, the choir.

Let's see what he has to say this week. Totally not found in the New Testament. God the Holy Spirit is available to every single one of us.

You want your life to be exciting, just get acquainted better with the Holy Spirit. So that's the first thing, that God is just looking for instruments and nobody wants to be famous. Anytime you hear a preacher flaunting himself, broadcasting his name or his picture and wants to start a personality cult around himself as the pastor who has the message, that's someone who doesn't know God hardly at all.

Because if you know anything about God, you say, please, don't, just Jesus, please don't mention me. Just get Jesus there, hide me. Number two, do you notice not only that God uses non-entities as the world would say, but notice how strange God's dealings are.

There's a great revival going on in Samaria. I mean, to beat the band, things are going bonkers for God. People are getting converted, demons are being cast out and Philip's doing it.

And who sent him there? We don't know, no one. He just ended up there and God is with him. You got to get this.

When God is with you, something good is going to happen. Can you say amen to that? You don't need, well, I need to go that, that's not my job. No, your job is just to get filled with God and let it roll.

He's in the middle of this revival and God orders him to leave and go to a road in the desert. No board of trustees, no human intelligence would ever come up with such a lame brain plan. You're in the middle of something that God has used you to start.

And now, in this case, an angel of the Lord, but it's God working through the spirit, spirit with the angel, working all together. God says, leave it and go to a road. If you were like me or you and I were, Philip, we would have said, por que, why? Not your business, just go.

Oh, it takes faith to follow God, the Holy Spirit. It takes faith to follow God's plans. Does that make any sense to anybody here? He's leaving where it's happening to go to a desert road.

He doesn't even know his assignment. So if you're a control person and you want to know everything and you have your own personal GPS that's going to lead you through your life, you got to throw it down because God works, his ways are not our ways, his thoughts are not our thoughts. Can we just celebrate the fact that God doesn't think the way we do? So, Philip is on a road.

I'm trying to picture him because you got to use your imagination when you read the scripture. So he's on a road and he's just standing there. If you would have walked up to him and say, what are you doing here? Well, I was in Samaria and everything was going just great.

People are getting saved, baptized, all kinds of things. I know, but what are you doing here? God sent me here. I know for what, he never said.

See, that's the problem with us. We got to know everything before we're going to obey God. You're never going to be led by God.

I'll never be led by God unless we're crazy enough in our faith to say, God, I'm going to follow you. I don't care what it is, just show me what you want me to do. So he's there and it's a road.

So there's, you know, it's not Chevrolet and Ford, but it's chariots going back and forth. So a nice one comes by, new model chariot. And the spirit says to him, go up and get running and walking, stay near that chariot.

Why? Nothing, no why. Just do it. Come on, this is God telling us.

You want to be led by the spirit? You want to be used by the spirit? You want your Christian life to have vitality and excitement every day? Every day, every day. You never know what the spirit could do if we were open to him. Philip didn't know that morning he woke up that he'd end up on that road.

And the spirit says, just join yourself to the chariot. And there's the chariot and he's walking. And he hears the guy reading out loud from Isaiah 53.

And now he puts two and two together and comes up with four and goes, excuse me, heard what you're reading, you understand that stuff? And the eunuch says, who's got a big position, head of the treasury for

the queen of Ethiopia. That's the Cushites in the Old Testament. That's the Ethiopians, as in Ethiopia.

That made sense, didn't it? So he said, how do I know what it means unless someone explains it? Oh yeah, come on up into my chariot. He hops into the chariot. And when he reads what the man was reading, Isaiah 53 prophecies about what happened to the Messiah when he came.

He would be not open his mouth, although they tried him. Oh, Jesus has tried for us. He got beat up for us.

They massacred his back. They ripped his head apart. They put a crown of thorns on it.

And he never said a word. He took it all for us. He shed his blood for us.

And the eunuch said, is this passage about the prophet, Isaiah, or is it about someone who would come after that? And Philip goes, I am so happy you asked me that question. I got a lot to tell you. And he tells them about Jesus.

And right there, the eunuch, the Ethiopian eunuch, puts his faith in Christ and makes public confession and then says when he hears about believe and be baptized, he said, here's some water. Why can't I get baptized right now? And Philip's baptizing him. He's not an ordained minister.

He never went to seminary. He's not an apostle. He's not anything.

He what? He was handing out food a few weeks ago. He said, yeah, let's do this thing. Puts him in the water, baptizes him, and that's how the gospel went to Africa.

God pulled Philip away from Samaria because he wanted the gospel to go to the great continent of Africa. And now the Christian historians all agree that the gospel first came there through a eunuch who had converted to Judaism but now was a Christian. And he worked for the queen of Ethiopia.

Who knows that he led her to the Lord and led another to the Lord. And then they started people leading. See, God has a plan.

The influence of just one convert, you and I can never know, one person we talked to, how God could use that person to influence their family, extended family, in this case, probably a nation as the gospel spread. So God knows what he's doing. God always knows what he's doing.

And when we don't see it and we can't understand it, we gotta trust, no, Holy Spirit, you guide me, you lead me. Speak to me, Holy Spirit. I wonder, as I close, when the last time some of you ever heard the Spirit's voice.

Now, when the Spirit spoke to Philip, it didn't say that it was an audible voice. I doubt that it was that. But one of the fine arts of Christian living is to be able to discern your mind's voice, people's pressure voice, your peer pressure voice, your looking glass self, all the sociological terms, and to be able to discern, wait a minute, that was God the Holy Spirit telling me to do something.

Don't you think he wants to talk to us? I leave you with this thought. How in the world will the world change unless the Holy Spirit's power and ability to lift up Jesus is let loose on the earth? He's the only one who can do it. He was the one sent to do it, to convict people, to encourage people, to build people up.

But how would that happen unless the Holy Spirit finds instruments, vessels to work through? I always have been leery about people saying, you know, God's on the throne, and this is what God is gonna do. Well, but remember, the Holy Spirit has to work through the body of Christ. And when there's Christians who have shut the door down on the Holy Spirit, I speak in churches.

They no more want the Holy Spirit than they want me to do brain surgery on them. They don't want the Holy Spirit. Listen, as Tozer said, A.W. Tozer, the great writer, he said, look, the Holy Spirit could leave planet earth, and many churches and Christians wouldn't notice it for two or three years, because they can do church without the Spirit.

I wanna declare something on behalf of my wife and I and the pastors. We can't have the Brooklyn Tabernacle without the Holy Spirit. How many say amen to that? We can't do it, cannot do it.

I can't counsel without him. I can't counsel without him. We can't see chains broken.

We can't see lives changed. Ah, but to be sensitive and to hear his voice and obey it, it can be in little things, so-called big things. They're all the same to God.

This counseling problem has been on my heart. It's troubled me. I've asked God for wisdom for that minister in a wheelchair and his six children bouncing around in a hotel.

My wife and the other pastors know Pastor Burgos helped me. He's an excellent counselor, very wise. Pastor Petri, others, very good counselors.

I'm very defensive toward this man and his six children. I had them here last Sunday just so I could use an excuse to feed them a meal. That's private to me.

Well, now you know. So God help them. I gave them the best counsel I know.

No, Jim, Pastor Jim, you see, I don't wanna run from the city. I read Fresh Wind and Fresh Fire. You and Carol never ran.

You went through this and your daughter and all that. I went, no, no, no, no, no. I said, you don't even know me.

Why are you here? I've met you four or five times. Why are you pouring everything out to me? No, no, I can trust you and all that. I'm going, no, you don't get it.

My wife was never six months pregnant with cancer. I don't have six kids. You gotta understand, I wanna help you.

So I'm just going like, God, how can I help them? Well, I gave them the best counsel I could. They've listened to it. They felt, and Pastor Burgos agreed with it.

I go to Memphis this week to speak at a very large church there in Memphis. They have me every August to speak on a Wednesday night. It's called Awesome August.

I ain't awesome, but they had me anyway. I'm preaching, and I haven't used notes for eight years. I have to commit my mind to God every time I preach.

Like now, I have to commit my heart and my mind to the Holy Spirit. Whatever application, whatever examples you give me, I have no paper to consult. So I'm preaching about how we need God all the time in our lives, and how we can't do it without God.

How many are with me on that fact? Just say amen. Okay, so I'm preaching, and out of nowhere, I think of this guy, and I said to the people, look, you look at me. I've been doing this for a while.

I had a situation, I totally hit a wall, and this guy's listening to every word. He might do what I say. What if I give him the wrong counsel? What if I say the wrong thing? That's a lot, right? Is that pressure? You know, I wanna help, but then if you say the wrong thing, the person could say, what was that about? So I just said to the people, not even 30 seconds, hey, listen, I met this guy.

He's in a wheelchair. He's a minister. Got six kids, all homeschooled.

Wife is now six months pregnant. They've been tossed out. They're living in hotels.

They've been evicted from the house they had in Coney Island, the two-floor apartment, and now, I said, you know, we need God, but thank God, if we go to God, he can help us. So then I went right off to the other part of the sermon. I made an invitation.

People came and prayed. It ended beautifully and all that. I'm walking off the stage, and the pastor says, just hang on, so the pastor goes up to the front.

He says, you know what? While Pastor Jim was talking, the Holy Spirit told me that we're supposed to take an offering for this man. Now, they know this man from 30 seconds, 30 seconds. That's how long I mentioned him.

So everybody now, we've been praying. Everybody go back to your seat, and we're gonna take an offering for this man and his family. Then he calls me the next day when I get off the plane from Memphis.

He says, I just want you to know, it's gonna be just, we're making it out to the Brooklyn Tabernacle. You'll get it to the guy. I said, for sure.

He said, good, we're gonna give him about \$20,000. Come on, is God awesome? Come on, is God awesome? Because I mentioned him. That was the Holy Spirit.

I wouldn't plan to mention him. And then the Spirit spoke to that pastor, and they'd already taken their main offering. He made everybody go back and took another offering.

When I told the man, I called him. He's on his way back to a state where he's gonna get things stabilized with his wife, children. He got emotional, and he said, oh, how can I thank you enough? And I said, brother, this has nothing to do with me.

God is tracking you. God is gonna help you. God is gonna see you through.

I just want everybody throughout the building, sitting right where you are, no altar call. You don't need to come to the altar. You need to get to God.

You don't need Jim Cimballa. You need the Holy Spirit. You don't need the Brooklyn Tabernacle.

You need the grace of God, the blessing of God. Just talk to God right now and say, God, I'm a believer. I'm a Christian.

I'm as qualified as Philip. I don't need a title. I just need you.

And in my circle, whether it be small or large, influence comes from you. Promotion comes from the Lord. God use me.

Holy Spirit, speak to me. Guide me, lead me. Save me from all fanaticism.

Save me from deception. Save me from the tricks of the devil. But I want the real Holy Spirit in my life in a new way, in a powerful way.

And I want it to begin today. Today, not manana, today. Thank you for your word to us today, Lord.

Lord, we are now candidates like Philip to be used by you to glorify Christ and help the world. How, where, when, all that, that's your business, not ours. Just teach us to hear your voice, feel your prompting, discern what's going on, and then obey you.

And then give you all the glory. If there's anyone here, Lord, who needs to be baptized Tuesday, let them get to a pastor, Lord, at the end of the service or a deacon so that we can baptize them just like the Ethiopian eunuch was. We thank you for sending the gospel to Africa way back when through one man who used to hand out food.

For it's not by might nor by power nor by cleverness, but it's by your Spirit. Forgive me, forgive us as a church if we've shunned you, grieved you, hurt you in any way, Holy Spirit. Have mercy on me, forgive me, forgive us.

But let there be a flowing of mighty rivers in our midst. And starting today, Lord, using every one of us, forgive us our trespasses, even as we forgive those who have trespassed against us. Bind us together in love, for we pray it in Jesus' name.

And everyone said. I want you to stand and hug five or six people that you don't know, come on. Stand up, everybody hug someone.

Choir, hug each other.

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