

Small Gospel Acts Still Change the World

by Matt Brown

God wants to use our ordinary moments to share the gospel and give us a passion for people who are far from him.

Duration: 32:32

Scripture: Acts 8:1

Topics: "Gospel", "Evangelism", "Impact of Small Acts"

Description

Matt Brown emphasizes the significance of small gospel acts in changing the world, drawing inspiration from the story of Philip in Acts 8. He highlights that every Christian is called to share the hope of Jesus with those around them, regardless of their circumstances. Brown encourages believers to live with eternity's values in view and to be passionate about reaching those who are far from God. He illustrates how Philip's obedience to the Holy Spirit led to the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, which ultimately impacted an entire nation. The sermon calls for Christians to recognize the power of their everyday interactions and the potential for small acts of faith to create lasting change.

Transcript

Everywhere I go, I've been sharing the gospel around the world as an evangelist for the past 15 years. And it's my heartbeat, and in fact, our ministry, as Pastor Kay mentioned, is called Think Eternity, and so it's perfect to come along the side of this series, Epiphany, the appearing of Christ. Up until that moment, God, obviously, through His Word, He has work for us to do.

There's things that He's called every one of us to, leading into eternity. And so I just love that theme of living in light of what really matters in eternity. Live, as someone said once, live with eternity's values in view.

There was a preacher once that I was super inspired by that kind of helped us pick our ministry name that just had a card on his desk when he would work that said eternity, because he didn't want to forget to live for what really matters in God's eyes. And so this is a beautiful series to be considering. And I want to talk to you specifically about the task that God has given us in light of eternity, leading up to forever, to share the hope of Jesus with the people around us.

Every Christian is called to share with people around them who are outside the church, who are far from God, in their families, in their neighborhoods, in their workplaces, in their friendships, to share with those

who don't yet know Christ, to share the great hope of the gospel of Jesus that has changed everything in our lives. I would bet that you're all with me that Christians are nowhere near perfect. Anyone ever believe that, experience that? But when Jesus comes into your life, everything changes.

The trajectory of your life changes. And it's amazing. I'm not perfect, but I know the one who is.

And so God has called us to share that. Now, this might surprise you, but there's not, even as evangelists I'm saying this, there's not a lot of passages in the Bible on how to share the gospel. There's some, but you'd think there'd be more.

But the Bible is full of examples of people, the early church, of Jesus, of the first leaders of the church, of the church, sharing the gospel. It's full of examples of them doing it. It's full of examples of them with this incredible passion and this incredible burden that the church would grow, that people would find God.

The Bible is really more full of how-to. The how-to's in the scripture is how to walk with God, how to know Him. Because everything that we do for God in serving the church and sharing the gospel has to be an overflow out of who we are in God.

If we get connected, Jesus said, if you abide in me, you'll bear much fruit. So if we're plugged into God, there's going to be- we're not going to be yawning in our spiritual lives. If we're plugged into God, there's going to be an excitement, but also there's going to be fruit.

There's going to be God moving through us and touching people around us. But anyway, so scripture is full, though, of examples of people sharing the gospel. And I want to share one passage with you today and talk about the ramifications of this man's life for our lives.

It's in Acts chapter 8, if you want to turn with me there. The scriptures are full of examples of how-of sharing the gospel and how small gospel acts truly do change the world. And that's what I want to talk to you for a few minutes this morning about.

How small gospel acts truly do change the world. You wouldn't think this sometimes, but when you share the gospel, 1 Corinthians, Paul talks about, who wrote 1 Corinthians, he says what sometimes seems like the foolishness of preaching, God moves through that. Somehow when you share the facts about Jesus, when you share what he's done for you, you wouldn't necessarily expect other than having experienced it, but you'd think it's so simple, but then when you tell that to a neighbor, when you tell that to the friend, it can literally change their life because God has chosen to use the preaching of the gospel.

God has chosen to use the communication, the speaking of who he is to transform the hearts and lives of the people around us. Small gospel acts truly do change the world. So in Acts chapter 8, we're going to read a story about a man by the name of Philip, who the scripture says was an evangelist.

And this isn't Philip, one of the 12 apostles, this is Philip the deacon, who in Acts chapter 6, a few chapters before, what happened was the early church, the 12 apostles, were experiencing incredible growth in the church, God was moving, people were coming to faith, there was thousands of people who were responding to Christ when the gospel was preached, and at that point, some of the feeding programs weren't going well, and people were complaining because there was so much to be done, and so what the 12 first leaders of the church said is, hey, pick seven people from among us who are full of wisdom and who are full of the Holy Spirit, and raise them up to leadership to oversee this, so that we can focus on prayer and on the preaching of the word, because it would be bad if that was neglected, that's an

important thing for church leaders. And so these seven were raised up and chosen from among them, and then we begin to see that in Acts chapter 7, after these men were chosen, actually starting in 6 into 7, that some of these deacons began to, from serving and from helping the needy and from taking on those responsibilities of the church, they also began to preach the gospel and be used by God in that way as well. And maybe more of them were, but we see for sure in the scripture that two of them, and so Stephen preaches the gospel and is sharing, and he ended up getting, he becomes the first martyr for the faith in the early church.

He gave his life rather than deny his faith in Jesus, it was that important to him. He was the first one. And then where we're going to read today, Acts chapter 8, Philip begins to also preach the gospel, so that's where we land.

Acts chapter 8, verse 1, and we're going to read verse 1 through 8, and then we're going to jump with Philip and his story to verse 26, and continue to read about how he was used by God to share about Jesus. In Acts chapter 8, 1, On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and everyone except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him, but Saul began to destroy the church, going from house to house.

He dragged out both men and women and put them in prison. Those who'd been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there.

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're going to jump down to verse 26. Now an angel of the Lord, in the midst of everything God was doing through him in Samaria, an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 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 queen of the Ethiopians.

This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home he was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The spirit told Philip, Go to that chariot and stay near it. Philip ran up to the chariot, and he 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 that the Ethiopian was reading.

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer 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? And 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, and the eunuch said, Look, here's water. Who can stand 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. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch didn't see him

again, but he went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Ezodus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

And it's believed that Philip stopped in Caesarea, because later in Acts we find that Philip is still living in Caesarea, and he has four daughters, and probably traveled and preached from Caesarea. But there's several key lessons in the story of Philip about what it means to share this incredible hope of Jesus. And I want to share a few of those with you this morning.

How to make our days count for eternity. And the first one is that God wants to use our ordinary moments. God wants to use our ordinary moments.

The chapter starts with the dispersion of the church after persecution. And so there's really, in these passages that I read this morning, two things that led Philip to share the gospel. Number one was his circumstances, which in his case were bad.

The church was being persecuted, a bunch of people left, and guess what? They took the gospel with them, and they went to share. And this actually led to an incredible expansion of the church, this difficult circumstance. And then the second thing that we see in the passage, starting in verse 26, was that the Spirit of God led Philip to go and to share the gospel.

So these two things. What happened in the first part of the chapter is that God was moving so much through Philip, and if I were to continue to read, the apostles came up and even wanted to see. The first leader, the main leaders of the church even came up, they wanted to see what was happening because God was moving in such a great way.

But in verse 26, God tells Philip, leave this incredible thing that's happening and go down a desert road. Leave the amazing things I'm using you to do and go down this desert road. The roads, at that time that Philip would have taken, there was two roads down through Jerusalem into Gaza.

One was the populated road with houses and people, and one was this isolated desert road. And God said, leave the great things I'm using you to do here and go down the desert road because I have something for you to do there. And so Philip obeys.

The distance that Philip would have traveled would have been probably 80 to 150 miles by foot along this path because we don't know exactly where he meets this Ethiopian. But what it shouldn't be lost on us this morning is that Philip left the big thing. He was willing to leave the big thing in obedience to God and to follow where God would lead.

Mother Teresa, the famous missionary to India, once said, We can do no great things, only small things with great love. She also had a quote where someone once asked her, How do we promote world peace? What can we do? And she said, Go home and love your family. And today she might have said, Go home and be careful about what you post on Facebook.

Promote world peace. But it's this ability to focus on the micro. And Philip had learned this.

He came into his leadership role in the church to serve. To serve the needs of the needy. To make sure the feeding program was moving forward.

So it wasn't an uncomfortable thing for him to say, God has spoken to me, an angel of the Lord, to leave this and to go down a desert road for some reason. But we need to understand that there is a miracle of God in our ordinary moments. God wants to work a miracle just in our everyday lives, through us, when we share the gospel.

And so we can't assume that the work of God only moves forward just from incredible church services, or God moving, or in a service, or a crowd, or a concert. But God wants to do things when we're at work. God wants to do things when we're at home FaceTiming or calling one of our relatives or our family.

God wants to do a miracle in our ordinary moments. The second thing about Philip that he had in this story that God wants to say to us this morning is that God wants to give us a passion for people who are far from him. God wants to give you a passion for people that are outside the church, that are away from him.

See, the thing about this passage is that Philip took the gospel, and you might not realize this, but he took the gospel to the Samaritans, who were really hated by the Jews at this time. And there was a deep historical rift between the two people groups. And Philip was really the first, one of the first, to take the gospel to the Samaritans.

It was only later in Acts that Peter got the vision from heaven of taking the gospel to the Gentiles. And so Philip is really one of the first to say, I want to take the gospel to those who are far, far from God, those who are disconnected from his people. And Philip was willing to go there to Samaria.

There's probably many places he could have gone across Judea and Samaria, but he went to Samaria to preach Christ. He had a passion for those who were far from God. And not only that, you see in verse 26 when Philip goes and God leads him, and he goes alongside of the Ethiopian eunuch who also would have been very different from him in his world.

He was there probably worshiping as a God-fearing Jew. He's reading the book of Isaiah. And Philip goes alongside of him.

God spoke to him, and it literally says that Philip ran up to the chariot, or ran alongside the chariot to talk to this man. There was this passion in him for people to know about Jesus. And I can only imagine where that could have come from.

Philip may have been there in those early church meetings where the apostles would tell the stories about Jesus, and the stories that Jesus would tell about how Jesus told the story once about how those who are far from God are like the prodigal son, who take their father's inheritance and they go off and they waste it. And Jesus told this story, and Philip may have heard this story, about how this son comes back thinking, if only I could be a servant in my father's house. If only I could just be a servant there, it would be way better than how I've wasted my life.

And he's coming back, and while he's still a long way off, Jesus tells the story, and he's comparing this father to God in heaven, to the Father in heaven. And he says, while this wayward son was still a long way off, the father ran to his son, and he embraced him. All is forgiven.

You're home. Finally, you're home. Let's throw a party.

Let's throw a banquet. Let's throw a huge banquet. Everyone's invited.

That's what Philip may have learned about the father heart of God, that God longs for those who are far from him to come to know him. God is interested in the people around us every day. God wants to reveal his truth and his grace.

1 Timothy 2.4, Paul later writes, God wants everyone, all people, to be saved. God wants all people to come to a knowledge of the truth. God in heaven is longing for his wayward children, our friends and our neighbors, to know him.

And I don't know if you've felt that, or if you've experienced that, but for me, since I sensed a call to evangelism in my late teens, I felt a God-given burden that has propelled me through all of these years of ministry, this broken heart of God for people who need him. I felt this incredible passion that's not my own. It's given from God.

He put it in my heart. And even then, I still feel I have a long way to go in sharing my faith. I'll just say that.

But I have five people that I know who are incredible examples to me and constantly inspiring me on the importance of sharing Christ. One of them is my mom. She can go into a gas station and people will come to Christ.

She actually had a leg problem recently that she's been doing some therapy on, and both of those therapists have come to Christ now. And then another one would be a gentleman by the name of Mark Middleberg. Mark Middleberg has written what's probably the best-selling book of all time on how to share your faith.

It's sold millions of copies, which is crazy when you think about the content, that there's that many people hungry, that's exciting. And Mark, I first came across his writing and his stuff when, now all of my grandparents have passed away, but it was just about last year that my grandpa, around this time, that my grandpa Brown passed away, my final grandparent. And by the way, I have grandparents now through my wife, so I've got some great grandparents through my wife.

But my grandpa Brown, I remember years ago, probably the most profound experience that I have with him, when he was reading a book called *Becoming a Contagious Christian* by Mark Middleberg, this author that I mentioned. And I remember it so well because there was a spark in my grandfather's eye that I had not seen before. There was an excitement in his faith that I had never seen.

And he was getting this God-given passion to share the gospel. And so, ironically, you can't make this stuff up. This last year, less than a week after my grandfather died, I don't even know if I put the two and two together, but my grandfather died.

And less than a week later, we held a conference tour across Texas where Mark Middleberg was one of our speakers. And the only thing I inherited from my grandpa was this tattered *Becoming a Contagious Christian* book. And I had Mark sign it, and he wrote a kind note in there, reminding me of how much that impacted my grandfather.

But I want to just say, your kids and your grandkids someday, and your family, they need to see that spark inside of you. It's good for them. And so, that book, by the way, is fantastic.

I've started to read it. And there's this powerful formula that Mark Middleberg shares for sharing the gospel. Do you guys want to know it? He says that high potency, Christianity, so like really, truly

connecting with God, following Jesus, and experiencing his life inside of you, high potency, plus close proximity to nonbelievers.

Because he says, hey, you could be passionate about the Lord, but if you're never in a place to connect and talk with and get to know nonbelievers, you're not going to be able to rub off on them. So, high potency plus close proximity, plus clear communication of the gospel. Meaning there comes a time, when we're talking about the gospel and evangelism, when we have to explain who Jesus is and what he did for us and offer that to the people around us.

There comes a time in our relationships where that needs to be brought to the forefront and clearly expressed. Those things together equal maximum impact for the church and for the gospel. And I love that.

I think that's one of the best things that I've seen about that. Philip's story also gives us some how-to on sharing the gospel. It says in verse 26, and then a little bit later, Philip is led by an angel, and then he's led by the Holy Spirit to go alongside the chariot.

And God wants to lead us by his Spirit to share the gospel too. So, there may come a time in your everyday life, the ordinary moments, where God prompts your heart and you feel that he's telling you to share the gospel with someone. Maybe they're a friend or maybe they're someone you don't know well.

But God will put it on your heart and you'll sense this urgency or this strange sensation, I need to talk about Christ. I need to tell this person something about Jesus. I need to ask this person a spiritual question or I need to ask if I can pray for them.

And that will lead into sharing the gospel with them. Partly because we don't know, no one's guaranteed tomorrow. Listen, you... It's wonderful to learn and read and study about how to live a healthy and how to live a productive life and be efficient and do good at our jobs, but we're all still going to die someday.

And so that makes the gospel the most important news of all. And so, Philip was prompted and God wants to prompt us too. And then also Philip was prepared to answer this man's questions.

And as best as we can, it's good for us to be prepared to answer people's questions. It's okay if we can't answer them all, but we do what we can to guide people the right direction. 1 Peter talks about this as well.

1 Peter 3.15 In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you, to give the reason for that hope that you have. People are going to see hope in us.

They do see hope in us. And then this is a great part, but do this with gentleness and respect. What really engages people with the gospel is when we live lives that are so different because we live with the fruit of the Spirit, a whole lot of love, a whole lot of joy, a whole lot of peace, a whole lot of patience, kindness, gentleness.

We should filter our Christian lives. We should filter what we post on Facebook, by the way, through this. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness.

That's what God wants to work in us. That's how we know if it's His Spirit and not our flesh that's talking, that's speaking. Truth always in love.

1 Peter 3.15 says not only live out your faith with the fruit of the Spirit, but when you share the gospel even, do it gently. Do it with respect. Give people dignity.

And through that, you'll be effective because you're not like the world around you, but you've been changed. Your attitude is different because of Christ. Third thing, final thing that we learned from Philip is that God still uses our small gospel acts to change the world.

You may not know this, but this man was in the Ethiopian unit. Ethiopia is the second largest nation in Africa today behind Nigeria. And still to this day, three-fourths of the population of Ethiopia consider themselves Ethiopian Orthodox Christians that all lead back, if you read the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, to this one Ethiopian eunuch who was led to Christ by Philip.

This is, by the way, 2,000 years later. And they believe this Ethiopian eunuch's name was Bachos. He came to his country.

He began to lead the queen and the leaders of the country to faith in Jesus Christ, which slowly led down throughout the population. And years later, Ethiopia became either the second or potentially even the first nation to consider themselves a Christian nation. This is thousands of years before America, by the way.

And that's all attributed to this one act of the Lord leading Philip down a desert road in an ordinary moment, away from the excitement, to share Jesus, to share the gospel, and God just has a way of doing that. And listen, I don't know if you're going to go, this was an Ethiopian, this was the CFO of the country, the treasurer, oversaw the treasury of the country. I don't know if you're going to go talk to somebody who's the treasurer over a whole nation.

Maybe you will. But I do know this, that if you share the gospel and someone responds to the gospel, it can change the trajectory of their entire family for generations to come and potentially more. And that small gospel act can literally change everything.

Eusebius, the first church historian, says the same thing about this Ethiopian eunuch that it eventually led to the salvation of the nation. And now millions upon millions who've known Christ because of a small gospel act. And this reminds me in our generation of a story that I've heard about a church in Chicago in the 1980s that was a young, start-up church, excited about the Lord, wanted to reach people.

They were built around, let's reach out to people who are far from God. This is actually the church where Mark Middleburg used to be a pastor, one of the pastors on staff, who I talked about earlier, the author. Well, one of the ladies in this church shared her faith, began to invite a lady in her town to come to church with her, and this young lady named Leslie ended up coming to church with this woman.

And they, she started coming, and she came again, came again. Leslie was from a definitely different background than church world, religious world. She was not church-ed at all.

And she was a young mom, had one child and one on the way. And after coming several times to church, she heard a clear communication of the gospel, and Leslie, in that service, put her trust in Jesus. She came back that evening, and she told her husband, who was not very happy about the news, because her husband had great background and went to Yale and had become the legal editor at the Chicago Tribune at this point.

And he was, basically from his teenage years, had become an atheist. And so when she came home and said, Jesus, I feel like is the best thing that's ever happened to me, he says, what about me? I'm your husband. And he was angry.

Divorce went through his mind and began several years of a very rocky relationship, as if it wasn't already a little rocky before that. But that was a struggle. And she tried to live out her faith in front of him, and she would pray for him and it was tough.

And one of the things, her friends at church were telling her how to be winsome, and they were telling her, love him, like, show him how much you love him, and let him see the difference of Christ in you and how you love him. And they would tell her, they eventually told her to pray, Ezekiel 36, 26, one of her friends told her, over him, which says, and I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you, and I will take out your stony, stubborn heart, and I will give you a tender, responsive heart. And so, over the next few years, daily, she would pray that over her husband.

Her husband was so discouraged by what his wife had done that he began with his journalism background and legal training, he began a two-year investigation into Christianity in order to disprove it. He wanted to bring the evidence to her and say, listen, you're wrong. He went to experts, both inside and outside the church, in their fields, brought up all the questions he could about the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and after a year and nine months of traveling around the country on his spare time to do this, in the middle of his job and his family, he came to the conclusion that there was an avalanche of evidence pointing to the truth of Jesus Christ.

He felt at that point, as a staunch atheist, it would take more faith to maintain my atheism than to trust in Jesus Christ. He went home to his wife after she'd been praying this for him. She'd been praying this for him daily, and he said, Leslie, he told her what he'd been doing, he hadn't told her up to that point, and he said, I want to put my trust, I believe in Jesus now, and she prayed with him there to receive Christ into his life.

And I've actually had the chance to be around this couple. It has changed the trajectory of their family now to their kids and their grandkids from where they had been. And Jesus has changed everything from where they were going and who they would become.

And that man's name is Lee Strobel, who wrote a book called The Case for Christ. He wrote his journey and his story. That book has now gone on to have been read by 14 million people around the world.

And a movie company, over the last few years, just made his story into a film called The Case for Christ that will be in theaters nationwide next weekend. And I believe that the movie alone will go on to impact countless millions more. And so, honestly, the movie would be a great place to take a spiritually curious friend that you're praying for, a family member, and then on into the Easter services here at the Life Christian Church.

There's no greater need than the Gospel. And spending time with Leslie, she's been trying to watch before the premiere of this film next week, she's been trying to watch through it so that she gets all her crying out because she lived this out. And so she's watched it seven times, as what I last heard, and every time she cries through it because she lived this.

She felt like the pain of the struggle of reaching out to Him. But she would pray, Ezekiel 36, 26, God, would you take Lee's heart of stone and would you replace it with a tender, responsive heart to your Gospel? And what I want to ask you this morning, we're going to go into a time of commissioning and singing and worshipping together. And then Pastor Terry's going to come up.

But I want to ask you to think about the people in your life that you need to pray that prayer for. And I would challenge you, like Leslie was challenged, to pray that every day for your friends, for your neighbors. Some of you may know well, some of you may not know so well.

Pray, God, take their hard heart, just like I had a hard heart once, and replace it with a tender, responsive heart to your Gospel.

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