**THE PRESENT WORD, JESUS CALLS US, LESSON 12, AN ETHIOPIAN OFFICIAL BAPTIZED (Essay and Answers to Lesson Questions)**

## THE INCLUSIVITY OF THE EARLY CHURCH

### What do you think the story of the eunuch in Acts 8 implies about questions about LGBTQ+ people in today's church?

The story of the eunuch in Acts 8 raises questions about LGBTQ+ people in today's church due to its exploration of inclusivity and the acceptance of those who were traditionally marginalized or excluded. While the eunuch in the biblical context may not directly align with modern LGBTQ+ identities, the themes of acceptance, inclusion, and the breaking of societal barriers can provide valuable insights and reflections for today's church.

The eunuch's identity as someone who was considered different and potentially excluded from certain religious practices and roles parallels the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals who have often faced marginalization within religious communities. Eunuchs were seen as outside the norm, and their physical condition was sometimes associated with notions of defectiveness or deviance. Similarly, LGBTQ+ individuals have often been viewed as deviant or immoral based on interpretations of religious teachings.

In the story, we witness the radical inclusion of the eunuch into the early Christian community through his encounter with Philip. This encounter demonstrates the transformative power of the gospel message, which breaks down barriers and extends God's love and acceptance to all people, regardless of their background or circumstances. It challenges the prevailing societal norms and religious restrictions that excluded eunuchs, emphasizing the idea that the gospel is for all people.

By including this account in Acts, the author, Luke, underscores the message that the gospel transcends cultural, social, and religious boundaries. This broader message of inclusivity and acceptance can certainly be applied to LGBTQ+ individuals within today's church. It invites us to reflect on whether our understanding of Scripture and our

interpretation of religious teachings should be reevaluated to foster a more inclusive and affirming environments for all individuals, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

The story of the eunuch in Acts 8 does not provide direct guidance on LGBTQ+ issues, as it primarily addresses questions of social status and religious inclusion in its historical context. However, it serves as a reminder of the early church's commitment to inclusivity and challenges us to examine how we can extend that same spirit of acceptance and love to all members of our modern church community.

As Christians grapple with questions surrounding LGBTQ+ inclusion, it is essential to approach the discussion with empathy, open-mindedness, and a willingness to engage in thoughtful dialogue. While different interpretations of Scripture exist, it is crucial to prioritize the overarching principles of love, grace, and acceptance. The story of the eunuch reminds us of the transformative power of the gospel and invites us to foster an inclusive and affirming church community where all individuals are welcomed and valued for who they are.

In contemplating the story of the eunuch in Acts 8 and its implications for LGBTQ+ people in today's church, it is important to recognize that the Bible does not directly address contemporary concepts of sexual orientation or gender identity. The cultural and historical contexts of biblical passages must be considered when discussing LGBTQ+ issues.

However, the underlying themes of inclusivity, love, and acceptance found throughout the Bible provide a foundation for reflecting on how the church can engage with and support LGBTQ+ individuals. The story of the eunuch serves as a powerful reminder that God's love extends to all people, regardless of societal norms or religious restrictions.

As we consider the story of the eunuch, we should strive to create an environment in our churches where LGBTQ+ individuals are welcomed, embraced, and fully included. This entails fostering a space that promotes dialogue, understanding, and empathy, where individuals can explore their

faith and sexual orientation or gender identity without fear of rejection or discrimination.

The eunuch's encounter with Philip also emphasizes the importance of education and understanding. Philip took the time to explain the Scriptures to the eunuch, allowing him to gain insight and knowledge. Similarly, the church should strive to provide resources, support, and a safe space for LGBTQ+ individuals to engage in theological discussions, study the Bible, and seek understanding of their identities within the context of their faith.

It is essential for the church to engage in compassionate conversations about LGBTQ+ inclusion, listening to the diverse experiences and perspectives of LGBTQ+ individuals, and recognizing the harm that exclusion and discrimination can cause. While there may be differing interpretations of biblical passages related to homosexuality or gender identity, it is crucial to approach these discussions with humility and a genuine desire to understand and affirm the humanity and dignity of all people.

Ultimately, the story of the eunuch challenges the church to be a community that embraces diversity, fosters inclusion, and extends God's love to all. It reminds us to examine our own biases and prejudices and to create spaces where LGBTQ+ individuals can fully participate, contribute, and thrive within the life of the church.

In conclusion, the story of the eunuch in Acts 8 invites us to reflect on the inclusivity of the early church and how it relates to LGBTQ+ people in today's church. While the specific issues faced by the eunuch may not directly align with contemporary LGBTQ+ identities, the themes of acceptance, inclusion, and breaking down societal barriers resonate strongly. By embracing these themes and engaging in open, compassionate dialogue, the church can work towards creating a more affirming and inclusive community for all individuals, including LGBTQ+ people.

## THE UNUSUAL WORK OF THE SPIRIT

### In what ways do you think this passage challenges how we address racism today?

The passage of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 challenges how we address racism today in several ways. Firstly, the encounter between Philip and the eunuch highlights the inclusive nature of the early church. Despite societal prejudices and racial barriers, the eunuch is not only accepted but also receives instruction and baptism, emphasizing that the message of the gospel is intended for people of all races and backgrounds.

The reading of Isaiah by the eunuch is significant because it includes the prophecy from Isaiah 56:3-8, which speaks of foreigners and eunuchs being welcomed into God's house and having a place of honor. This challenges the biases and discrimination that were prevalent during that time, and it continues to challenge us today. The passage reminds us that God's intention is for His house to be a place of prayer for all people, irrespective of their ethnicity or social status.

Furthermore, the eunuch's racial identity as an African adds another layer to the discussion on racism. In the context of the Roman world, where being different was often associated with weakness or inferiority, the eunuch's ethnicity would have made him subject to racial prejudices. However, the story presents him as a respected and powerful figure, chosen by God to receive the message of salvation. This challenges our own biases and assumptions about people of different races and calls us to examine and confront any racist attitudes or actions that may exist within the church and society.

The passage challenges us to reevaluate our understanding of race and to actively work towards dismantling systems of discrimination and inequality. It reminds us that racism has no place in the kingdom of God and calls us to actively pursue justice, equality, and reconciliation among all races and ethnicities. It prompts us to examine our own hearts and actions, to identify and confront any racial biases or prejudices we may hold, and to actively

engage in the work of promoting racial harmony and justice in our churches and communities.

In conclusion, the passage of the Ethiopian eunuch challenges how we address racism today by emphasizing the inclusive nature of the early church and its rejection of racial barriers. It calls us to actively confront and dismantle racism, to create spaces of acceptance and equality, and to actively work towards racial reconciliation and justice. By embracing the principles of love, equality, and respect for all races, we can strive to build a church and society that reflects God's desire for unity and inclusion.

## STEPPING INTO THE WORLD

### Has God's Spirit ever directed you to minister in a certain way? What did you do?

The study of Acts 8:26-40 and the experiences of the Holy Spirit described in the passage prompt us to reflect on our own encounters with the Spirit and situations where our church has been Spirit-driven. The Book of Acts is often referred to as "The Book of the Spirit" because it provides numerous examples of the Spirit's work among the early Christians.

Personally, there have been instances where I have felt the leading and prompting of the Holy Spirit in my life. These moments have often involved a strong sense of urgency or a specific conviction to minister to certain individuals or engage in particular acts of service. One notable experience stands out when I felt compelled to visit a critically ill member of our congregation before embarking on a study leave. Despite having limited time and a busy schedule, the urging was strong, and I decided to follow the leading of the Spirit. Upon arriving at the member's house, I learned that the person had just passed away, and my presence brought comfort and support to the grieving family. We gathered in prayer, seeking solace and strength during that difficult time.

Like Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, the Spirit's guidance in our lives often involves being attuned to the needs of others and responding to those promptings. It may come in the form of an internal

conviction, a burden for a particular individual, or a clear direction to act in a certain way. These experiences remind us of the importance of being sensitive to the leadership of the Spirit and willing to step out in faith, even when it may seem inconvenient or unconventional.

In moments when I have felt the Spirit's leadership, I have sought to respond with obedience and a willingness to serve. This has involved reaching out to individuals in need, offering words of encouragement or prayer, and actively engaging in acts of compassion and justice. The Holy Spirit often directs us towards opportunities where we can be instruments of God's love and grace, bringing comfort, healing, and hope to those around us.

It is important to cultivate a receptive heart and a listening ear to the Spirit's promptings. By spending time in prayer, studying Scripture, and seeking the guidance of the Spirit, we can develop a greater sensitivity to God's leading in our lives. This enables us to discern when the Spirit is directing us to minister in specific ways and empowers us to step out in faith, trusting that God will use us as instruments of His love and transformation.

In conclusion, the passage in Acts 8 and our own experiences remind us of the Holy Spirit's role in guiding and empowering us for ministry. As we respond to the leadership of the Spirit, we can actively engage in acts of service and compassion, following the example of Philip and being attentive to the needs of others. By cultivating a receptive heart to the Spirit's guidance, we can participate in God's work of reconciliation, healing, and transformation in the world.