When it comes to the opening up of ministry opportunities, there are no coincidences – only times in which the Holy Spirit leads the way and we follow. As good disciples, we are always ready to explain God as God is revealed to us in Scripture and experience so that the Spirit can use us and lead us into these ministry opportunities.

Take this story of Philip, for example. The Holy Spirit, through persecutions, first directed Philip to leave Jerusalem and go to preach to the Samaritans. Philip had just finished preaching in Samaria when an angel directed him to walk on a particular wilderness road at the precise time an Ethiopian eunich is passing by and reading a passage from Isaiah.[[1]](#footnote-0) This particular eunich was a member of the court of Queen Candace and her husband who ruled Ethiopia between 25 and 41AD. He was either a Jewish proselyte (convert) or “God-fearer” (worshipper of God who had not formally converted to Judaism) and he had been to Jerusalem to worship where because of his being a eunich, he had not been able to enter the sanctuary. As he is traveling back to Ethiopia, he is reading the book of Isaiah, a book of hope for eunichs and other outcasts because it speaks of messianic times, when all marginalized people are allowed to participate in God’s kingdom.[[2]](#footnote-1) He is reading a passage about one who is lead to the slaughter and is silent before the shearer, who was humiliated and to whom justice was denied. Philip is sent to this man’s chariot at this precise time when this Scripture provided such an opening to discuss the love of God for all people, the sacrifice of Jesus for the world.

Not a coincidence, but rather an example of the Holy Spirit at work.

Philip, because of his grounding in his tradition through reading of Scripture and prayer, through his abiding in the vine that is Christ -- is ready to explain how this Scripture relates to Jesus, how it relates to God’s love for all people, including the eunich.

The eunich believes what Philip tells him and commits his whole heart to Jesus just as the chariot comes upon some water where he is baptized. Again, not a coincidence, but the workings of the Holy Spirit. After the eunich is baptized, he returns to Ethiopia where tradition tells us he told his queen about Jesus. Candace’s conversion caused her to use her office to promote Christianity throughout Ethiopia and surrounding countries. [[3]](#footnote-2) The Holy Spirit worked all things together to create an opportunity which led to the Gospel being spread to many people, and Philip is grounded enough in his tradition to seize that opportunity.

The Holy Spirit creates situations for us to tell about God’s love today – just as it did in Philip’s day. It goes ahead of us and prepares the hearts of people. It places us in situations where we can encounter these that the Holy Spirit has already prepared. As disciples, we are called to be ready --- grounded in our knowledge of Scripture and in our own experience with a loving God – so that we can recognize those opportunities and respond to them.

Dr. Jerry Root, professor of Evangelism and Leadership at Wheaton College in Illinois, tells this story of a time when the Holy Spirit placed him in a situation in which he could share God’s love. His flight was delayed, leaving him in the Vienna airport where he encountered a young woman, named Allegra, who was a survey taker. Instead of just taking the survey, Root began asking her questions about herself. He learned her mother had abandoned the family to move to Canada with a lover and that her father’s bitterness was toxic. He learned that she and her brother were estranged.

Here is what he says happened next

“When I expressed my sadness for what seemed to be a good deal of estrangement from the people closest to her, she said it was far worse than she confided. She told me she had a boyfriend who went to study art in Florence for six months. He asked her to wait for him, and she did so. Her boyfriend returned the very day before I met Allegra only to inform her he met somebody better in Florence.”

He continues, “I knew where God was wooing her, and I know the deep felt need where Allegra was likely to hear the gospel. After 20 minutes, she had not asked me one question. I said to her that I knew she had a survey to fill out but that I had been sent to tell her something. … She rushed through the airport's survey, then put down her pen, looked me in the eye, and eagerly asked, "What were you supposed to tell me?" Knowing that Allegra felt abandoned and betrayed, I said to her, "Allegra, the God of the universe knows you and loves you; He would never abandon you or forsake you." I said it to her again: "Allegra, he loves you!" Sometimes, it takes three times before the words sink in, so I said it again: "Allegra, he loves you!" After the third time she burst into loud sobs. Everyone in the gate area was looking in our direction. Through her tears, Allegra blurted out, "But I've done so many bad things in my life!" I responded, "Allegra, God know all about it and that's why he sent Jesus to die on the Cross for all of your sins and to bring you forgiveness and hope." [[4]](#footnote-3)

A coincidence that Dr Root’s plane was delayed and he happened upon this young woman. No. It was the work of the Holy Spirit. Dr Root, through his grounding in Scripture and in his own experience with God, was able to deliver the message to a heart that had already been prepared by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit will provide us with these opportunities, too. As disciples, we are called to be grounded in our tradition so that we not only recognize the Spirit’s leadership, but also can respond to it -- telling about God and God’s love for everyone.

Amen

1. Hughes, R. K. (1996). *Acts: the church afire* (pp 118-119). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Karen Baker- Fletcher, associate professor of systematic theology, Perkins school of theology, Southern Methodist University, in Feasting on the Word, *Lent through Eastertide*; David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, editors, Westminster-Knox Press, 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Women in the Early Church," *Christian History, Issue 17 (*1998) found on preachingtoday.com website [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Adapted from Dr. Jerry Root*, “*[When Evangelism Really Isn't That Hard,*"*](http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/february/when-evangelism-really-isnt-that-hard.html) *Christianity Today(2-17-17) found on preaching today.com website* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)