



ACTS: Phillip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

Acts 8:26-40 | Dan Toro | May 10, 2026

Opening

The year is 1978, and on the corner of Manor Road and Kingsley Avenue is a split-level duplex surrounded by a chain-link fence. Inside that fence is a rose garden, and it happens to be the first week of May, and Maria is in her element, tending to her roses. It is spring in New York City, winter has just wrapped up, and New Yorkers are outside enjoying the weather.

Out of the corner of her eye, Maria sees a couple walking by the yard with their baby in tow. Maria's two-year-old is toddling around the front yard, and she double-checks that the chain link gate is closed. The couple walking by doesn't stop - just some friendly smiles, a courteous greeting, the appropriate amount of New York acknowledgment of a stranger without being weird...and the moment is over, everyone carries on with their day. This social routine happens day after day. Safe eye contact, a short hello, maybe some benign platitude about the weather, and everyone returns to the rhythms of their day.

After a week of smiles and hellos, Chris and Bob stop by the gate while Maria is working among the roses. Chris goes out of her way to compliment the roses, and the conversation turns into a sweet, shared moment as they laugh about their little ones.

Two weeks in a row of good conversations, and Chris and Maria start looking for each other as they chit-chat across the chain link fence. The everyday ordinary movement of strangers from a few houses down...progressing into the acquaintance zone, then realizing their neighbor status, awareness grows about each other's story, before you know it, Maria and Chris become friends.

The Liminal Hinge

Have you ever heard of the storytelling phenomenon called the "liminal hinge"?

It's not a word we use every day, but the idea is simple. A hinge is small, hidden, and unremarkable. You don't walk into a room and say, "Your hinges are exquisite!"

You might notice the door hanging on the hinges, the paint on the walls, or the view through the windows.

Well, that's not true...some of you have liminal hinges that look like this...they're beautiful...

Other's of us...we kinda feel like our hinge moments look like this...

But the hinge—that small, quiet mechanism—carries a disproportionate amount of weight. It holds the tension between what WAS and what WILL BE.

And "liminal" simply means the space in between—the threshold. Not fully in one place, not yet in another. The moment where one chapter is closing, and another is opening at the exact same time.

Most of us miss the liminal hinge moments because they don't announce themselves. It's the short exchange when grabbing a shopping cart at Trader Joe's, the small talk at the chain-link fence in our front yard, the chitchat while you sit and wait for the plane to take off. It is the everyday, ordinary progression of a relationship that seems common. And yet, those are often the moments that can swing the weight of discovery.

Today, we step into Acts chapter 8. At first glance, this passage feels ordinary. No crowd. No stage. No drama. Just a road, a man traveling, another man walking by, and a divine liminal hinge:

"Now 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..." (Acts 8:26–27a)



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It doesn't feel like much, and yet the hinge turns - together, we'll look at the three stanzas to this account in Acts 8:26-40.

In the first stanza, there is the "Before" part of the story. We all have them, the moment that precedes the turning of the hinge, where we are still outside looking in. It's the moments that lead to an invitation.

The second stanza is the "Beyond" part of the story. Where we become aware of the threshold our toes rest on, and the decision to enter into a relationship.

The third stanza is where we eventually decide on the invitation, and as a result, we witness the "Become" stage of the story. By entering into relationship, we experience transformation. Those we invite into our lives will influence and shape who we become, but before we get ahead of ourselves, let's roll back the tape and look at stanza one, "before the invitation".

Before The Invitation

Divine Initiation (Acts 8:26-27)

Before the passage begins, God has already been moving in the lives of the characters in this story. While Philip is getting directions, the Eunuch has already started a journey. The angel of the Lord gives direction to Philip without detail—"Go." There is no outcome attached, no explanation of what Philip will find. This is important. The moment begins not with clarity, but with a sense of divine initiation, a stirring to start, and a conviction to obey.

"...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 (the Queen of the Ethiopians)." (Acts 8:27)

By the time Philip arrives, the other participants in the story are already in place. The Ethiopian is described as an important official with authority, influence, and access. And yet, despite his status, something more is going on beneath the diplomatic entourage, the expensive clothes, the fancy wheels, and the extensive education.

What lies beneath are the experiences.

Let's unpack the Eunuch a bit. There wasn't exactly a long line for this job, for obvious reasons. A eunuch wasn't a position people aspired toward—it was usually the aftermath of conquest, loss, and subjugation to others' power. Many eunuchs were formerly from noble families in foreign regions, only to be conquered, displaced, and forced into lifelong service to a royal household. Imagine carrying the heritage of your noble family line, your future, your lineage—and then having all of that violently taken away, losing not only your freedom, but even the biological ability to reproduce and forward family legacy into another generation. Scholars suggest that men like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shared the same painful reality after Israel was conquered and carried off into Babylon.

Imagine then, this Ethiopian Eunuch, and an important official in service to the Kandake, the Queen of the Ethiopians. Imagine the violations he had experienced - enough to justify real anger, the loss of what might have been in the cards before, and the robbery of hopes and dreams ahead. Identity is an area of crisis. Based on what we know about the role of a eunuch, this individual is carrying incredible pain beneath the fancy wardrobe and the importance of his position. We all have a story. There are things that stir within us, that hurt, that make us sad, that make us angry, that make us afraid. These are often the things that put the biggest dents in the shape of our identity, but hang with me, because the best is yet to come.

A Prepared Heart (Acts 8:27-28)

"He had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet." (Acts 8:27-28)



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Why is an Ethiopian worshipping in Jerusalem? Throughout the story of Israel, there is a biblical pattern in which neighboring nations notice how Israel's God demonstrates loving-kindness, provision, justice, and mercy toward those who would worship Him. What they observe draws them in. They begin to notice that this is not just another regional deity, not just another system of worship, but a God who is personal, attentive, and engaged with His people.

I remember times in my own life when I didn't have a father present, engaged, and loving- longing for a dad who would show up to my sports games, teach me how to drive, or be there on my wedding day. And when you carry that kind of absence, you start to notice when others have what you've missed. You notice the Dad who is attentive, protective, invested—and something in you says, "Man... I wish I had that."

In a similar way, some Gentiles looked at the God of Israel—the Abba-Father—and saw something different. A God who provides (Jehovah Jireh). A God who sees (Jehova El Roi). A God who draws near (Jehova Shammah). A God who protects (Jehova Nissi). A God who instills peace (Jehova Shalom). And they began to think, "What would it look like to be known like that? To be cared for like that? To have peace like that? So they draw near. They step closer to getting more familiar with Yahweh, because character does the heavy lifting in a lasting relationship. And once we get to know someone with excellent character, we can't help but move from curiosity to interest to emerging awareness to active engagement.

That's what we're seeing here. The eunuch is not just passing through Jerusalem as a tourist. He has come to worship. As a Gentile, he would have been limited to the outer courts of the temple—the place where observers could watch but not fully participate. He could see the rhythms of worship, hear the prayers, witness the devotion, see God's character—but he was still at a distance. Close enough to observe and be curious, but not yet fully engaged in the relationship.

And yet, something moves him to explore, to seek, to learn.

Just like many of us who may have grown up around religion—familiar with the language, the practices, the environment—but at some point begin to sense that there is something better than observing something good; and that is participating in something good, even better yet, is being transformed into something good. There must be something deeper than proximity. There must be a relationship.

That's where the eunuch finds himself. He has already made a spiritual journey. He has already traveled to worship. And yet, on his way back home, the search hasn't ended. He's still curious. Still reading. Still trying to understand.

In many ways, the eunuch becomes a model for us—because every person moves through recognizable stages in their journey toward Jesus. Sometimes it starts with simple awareness—just noticing something good about faith, so you start to trust it. Then it moves into curiosity—asking questions, exploring the "why". From there, there may be openness—a willingness to consider that it might actually be true. Then comes seeking—actively pursuing understanding of what that might mean for me as an individual. And eventually, there is the step of trust—crossing from curiosity into belief, applying the understanding to your own life.

And the eunuch is somewhere in that movement. He's beyond awareness. He's beyond passive curiosity. He's actively seeking. He's reading Scripture on his own, trying to make sense of what he's encountered.

Which means this—

The question didn't start with Philip.

Long before their paths crossed, the search for something more was already underway.

So the question becomes a little more personal:

Where are you right now?

What brought you here today?

Maybe you're just becoming aware—something about faith has caught your attention.

Maybe you're curious—asking questions, trying to sort things out.

Maybe you're skeptical—but you're still here.



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Maybe you've been seeking for a while, trying to connect the dots.

Or maybe you believe, and you're here strengthening that resolve.

Wherever you are—that place matters.

Because just like the eunuch, what may feel elusive and unfinished... might actually be preparation for the next leg of the journey.

The Spirit's Prompt (Acts 8:29–30)

"The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it.' Then Philip ran up..." (Acts 8:29–30)

Notice the progression—first "Go," now "Stay near." The movement becomes more specific but remains relational, not strategic or agenda-driven. Philip is not told what to say; he is only aware of where to be.

And then Philip hears something familiar, it's like seeing someone reading their bible in a coffee shop, and Philip asks the question:

"Do you understand what you are reading?" (Acts 8:30)

This question brings to the surface what is already stirring in the heart of the eunuch.

Beyond the Invitation

Human Honesty (Acts 8:31–33)

"How can I... unless someone explains it to me?" (Acts 8:31)

This is not resistance or defensiveness to a stranger challenging his intellect; it is openness. The Ethiopian acknowledges both desire and limitation. And then:

"he invited Philip to come up and sit with him." (Acts 8:31)

The liminal hinge. Something begins to shift. Not when Philip arrives. Not when Philip asks the question. But when the invitation is recognized.

The passage being read is from Isaiah:

"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." (Acts 8:32–33)

The Ethiopian is reading about suffering, humiliation, and injustice—but lacks the interpretive key. Maybe, for the first time, he feels like he isn't alone in his pain. He reads about the violence inflicted upon Jesus and begins to connect the dots about how hope, love, and peace might[a] still be possible in his own story.

The Interpretive Moment (Acts 8:34–35)

"The eunuch asked Philip, 'Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about...?' Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus." (Acts 8:34–35)

Philip does not introduce a new topic; he starts where the Ethiopian already is. The invitation creates space for clarity - not just clarity about religion and relationship with God, but clarity also about how all of that begins to reconcile the inner stirrings of sadness, anger, and fear that he is experiencing.

Back to NY in the late 70's

Back to Staten Island in 1978. The past two weeks of sidewalk conversations was leading up to Mother's Day week, but what Chris didn't see from the sidewalk was Maria's inner heart stirrings that occurred behind closed doors.

Only Maria was aware of the sadness and fear she was navigating. The relational strains that were overwhelming her. The questions she was wrestling with... and one night, after an exhausting day and an ugly fight with her husband, Maria stays up late and sits by the living room window of that split-level duplex on Manor and Kingsley.

She looks up at the night sky, and the question follows the quiet tears, "Are you real, God?"



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By the time Chris stops by for their regular sidewalk chit chat, the stirring has already started in Maria's heart...and God begins connecting the dots.

Then next time Chris and Maria see each other, Maria extends an invitation: "Would you come to my son's birthday party? It's on June 23rd."

The response from Chris, across the fence: "Oh, I'm so sorry, I have a previous commitment—I have a prayer meeting with my women's bible study. You should come sometime; we'd love to have you join us."

That phrase lingers.

"Prayer meeting?"

"Bible Study?"

Maria can't shake the curiosity - she kind of wants to go to this prayer meeting, Chris is so sweet! Maria is Catholic, she's prayed before, but she's never turned down a party to go pray. That seems weird...and also kind of interesting.

Eventually, a decision is made. Maria is so curious that she takes her new friend up on the invite.

Become the Invitation

Transformation and continuity replace curiosity and discovery.

Immediate Response (Acts 8:36–38)

"Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" (Acts 8:36)

The Ethiopian moves quickly from understanding to action. No delay. No extended deliberation.

"Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptized him." (Acts 8:38)

The response is embodied, visible, decisive.

Spirit-Led Continuation (Acts 8:39–40)

"When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away..." (Acts 8:39)

Philip exits the story as abruptly as he entered.

"...the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing." (Acts 8:39)

The transformation remains even as the story continues.

A Life Set on a New Trajectory

What started on a Staten Island sidewalk shifted into a rich relationship.

On May 13, 1978, Maria Toro made a faith commitment to Jesus at a small women's bible study. Bob and Chris Mohlenhoff had more kids and eventually moved to another home in a different neighborhood, but the women's Bible study still continued. Chris Mohlenhoff - the mom who complimented my mother's roses - became the liminal hinge that would lead to my mother hearing the gospel and committing to a relationship with God. My Mom would go on to share that invitation with her parents, her brother, her niece, her seven children, her 25 grandchildren...to date, 37 individuals and four generations have benefited from the grace that followed that sidewalk conversation. All because Chris mentioned a prayer meeting and was willing to say, "Hey, we'd love to have you join us."

What looked small becomes foundational. That conversation became the hinge. That decision became a trajectory. Chris literally embodied an invitation to someone she had connected with while out for a walk. All of us were impacted by Jesus because one mom took the time to be kind to another mom and invite her into a friendship with Jesus. I'm up here, talking to you about love, and peace, and hope, because one Mom became the invitation.



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The Unseen Impact

Philip would go on to become a good father and have four daughters, who would serve the church and be amazingly gifted women of God in discernment and words of wisdom. The Ethiopian eunuch would return to the royal family, and church tradition tells us that he shared his faith. By the end of the third century, the region of Ethiopia had officially become a Christian nation, preceding Rome's move to Christianity in the fourth century. It isn't too far a stretch to say that Ethiopia was impacted by Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian Eunuch. From that interaction, faith spread into everyday, ordinary moments- the workplace, the marketplace, families, neighborhoods - and eventually to the point where Church fathers like Eusebius, Athanasius, and Irenaeus tell us of the historical veracity of Christianity among Gentiles on the African continent.

The one who extends the invitation may never see the outcome- just like Philip.

Because the invitation is never about persuading people to believe in Jesus' love and kindness—it's about participating in and becoming the way Jesus shows his love and kindness.

Call to Faith: Standing at the Door

As we come to the end of this passage, I want to return to the image of the hinge.

Small. Hidden. Carrying more weight than it appears.

What we've seen is a threshold—a moment where something closes and something opens.

Moments like that happen now.

In conversations.

In questions.

In invitations.

Some of you may be standing in one of those moments.

And the question is not whether the door is there.

The question is whether you will respond.

In the book of Revelation, the author, John, describes Jesus as approaching where we reside spiritually and saying: "Here I am. I stand at the door and knock..."

Jesus approaches you in your moment of pain, or curiosity, or interest.

A hinge moment.

Where one chapter closes, and another begins.

The door is there.

The hinge is holding the weight.

And the invitation is open.

(Pause)

The question is—

Will you open your life up to Jesus?



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- * [a]love this!