

THE MISSION ADVENTURE: ACTS 8:26-39

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Baptist Student Union does many things well. Probably, one of the best things we do is out mission outreach programs. However, one aspect of mission outreach has started slowing down in the past 3-5 years. Home Mission Board statistics show the following downtrend in summer mission activity: From a high of 1544 missionaries sent in 1984 to a low of 1408 in 1987, and up just slightly in 1988 to 1412. Many valid reasons are advanced to explain this downtrend. Let's turn this trend around and head it in the other direction. Let's take our students on a *MISSION ADVENTURE!*

According to our text there are four elements in The Mission Adventure, and when these are presented to students, I believe they will be involved. They are:

- I. A CARING GROUP. Though the mission adventure in the text centers on just one person, it is a caring group that produces that one person. Philip first comes to our attention in Acts 6: 1-6 where he is chosen by a caring group (The Church) and set apart for special service. Hopefully, the Church will continue to be that caring group, but realistically, in the area of summer missions the Church is not producing that many candidates for missions. So, the BSU will need to work with the Church to be that caring group involved in the mission adventure. What then, is the caring group to care about? What does your group care about?? The pattern set in Acts 6, and throughout the New Testament sets forth two specific items to care about:

1. Bible study and prayer were the priorities of this first caring group. In this day when so much is being said in our denomination about the Bible and just who believes it “best”, I believe students can be the ones who set the pattern by studying the Bible and then living out it’s precepts. Lead your BSU to set the standard for a caring group by their Bible study and prayer. When this is properly done, it will lead to the second part of the caring group.
2. Care for people is the natural result of good Bible study and prayer time by any group. Jesus quoted the Bible often, but he was loved and followed mostly because of what he did with and for people. James admonished believers to be “doers of the word and not hearers only.” A caring group will constantly keep people and caring for people at the center of Bible study and prayer. Otherwise, we become like the professor who wrote a book on “loving children”, and how important it is to both children and parents to know this love. The professor had no children, but lived next door to a lady with two boys, 3 and 5 years of age. One day when the professor was doing yard work, including pouring a cement sidewalk, he left his fresh cement and went to the back yard. When he returned the two boys had thoroughly messed up his new sidewalk. He lost his cool and shouted at the boys and ran them out of his yard with threats on their lives. The mother of the boys heard all of this and confronted him about the difference in the words of his book and his actions. He answered her with this statement, “Madam, I love children in the abstract, not in the concrete!” It is easy for us to slip into loving people in the abstract — a caring group will

love people, whoever they are, and whatever their needs.

II. A DARING PERSON. Out of the caring group will come the daring person that God wants and needs to carry out the mission adventure. Students today are accused of being too interested in themselves to care much for the needs of people beyond their circle. However, properly presented, God's call can be as real to students today as at any time in history. The daring person needs to consider these two parts of mission involvement.

1. Dare to believe that God does call people to His service. Most Baptist students are familiar with the concept of being "called", but have trouble with the idea that they can be called. Verse 26 says that "an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying." Would your students heed God's call if an "angel" stood before them telling them of the need to go somewhere for God? I believe the answer to that is "yes", I would heed God's call if an "angel" told me. So, our need here is to help students realize their "angel" probably will not be some "heavenly creature with wings." An equally good translation of the Greek word "Angelos" translated here as angel, is simply "messenger." Thus, that returned summer missionary giving a testimony at the State Student Convention may be God's "Angelos" to call a daring student to go on mission for God as a summer missionary or other form of mission service. Students need help understanding this part of the "call."
2. Dare to believe that at times God's call will involve leaving something important to go to something that appears less important. A reading of this whole chapter of Acts 8 tells of

considerable response to Philip's preaching in Samaria. Yet, God called him to a "desert place" (V 26), that seemed to hold very little promise. Students have been challenged to always move on to greater and bigger things. Indeed, this is basic to our thinking in church and in the BSU. However, there are times when God's call is more important than anything in our lives.

3. Dare to believe that we have something worthwhile to share with the people we are called to help. Obviously Philip had experienced confirmation that what he was sharing had meaning for those who heard him. Often students have not had this confirmation. They need to hear of heroes of the faith who have been confirmed in their beliefs. One such person came into my life during a pastorate in the Northwest part of our country. A graduate student in our church was tragically killed during the Thanksgiving holidays as he drove toward home. I was invited as his pastor to conduct the funeral services in his hometown. After the service as I talked with the parents, I asked the father, who was a pastor, what they would be doing over the weekend to get away during this time of grief. He looked at me sharply and said, "Don, I will be in my pulpit on Sunday." As I remonstrated with him about this he replied firmly, "I have preached for thirty years that the message of Jesus Christ is sufficient for every crisis of life. If it is not, then I want to know that now." He did preach, and had the confirmation that the message is indeed sufficient. That experience and others along the way have given me the confidence to believe that the message we have for the people out there is helpful and we can feel good about

sharing that message. This leads to the third part of this mission adventure, our target audience.

III. AN ERRING ONE. The one to whom God sent Philip is a most interesting person. Look at what the scripture says about him, verses 27-28. We all very much need to think through our theology concerning the people to whom we are called to minister and help understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Too often our mind set is that the "erring ones" in our society are the derelicts and bums. That if people have it "together" in life, then they are probably OK with God also. That was not true here in this experience. We can learn from this erring one and his needs as we think through some of our mission destinations.

1. The Ethiopian was erring even though he was religious. The story says that he had been to Jerusalem to worship; he was riding along in his chariot reading Isaiah. From these obvious outward appearances we would judge today that this man was OK with God and we would probably not bother to even try to talk with him. However, for some reason God called a person specifically to go down to Gaza to meet with this religious man.
2. Even though he was erring, he was respected, honest and trusted with the Queen's treasury. Since he was a eunuch, I would assume that he could even be said to be without the usual sexual drives that lead to sexual impurities. In addition, he was probably very educated since he was reading and was charged with caring for the queen's financial affairs. Thus a person can emerge as an erring one who would fill the bill for many offices in BSU and possibly

even get on the deacon list of some Baptist churches. Why did God send Philip to this person?

3. The Ethiopian eunuch was erring because he had sinned and fallen short of God's plan for his life. That sounds like the same reason we all needed to hear the gospel and respond to Christ as our Savior. We must remember and keep reminding ourselves and our students that we go on mission because people have sinned and they are in need of a Savior. The physical, mental, emotional and social needs are excellent handles to grab hold of in order to minister to people, but the basic reason we need to go to them is because they have sinned and are lost without the redeeming power of Jesus Christ. Many students today have lost touch with the concept of what is involved in being "lost". We need to focus on this concept as we challenge students to be involved in the mission adventure. As the caring group helps in the calling out of the daring person to go to the erring one, what happens?

IV. THE SHARING OF A MESSAGE. Philip very wisely began to relate to this person to see what needs could be met in his life. His first question, "Do you understand what you are reading?" was the opening he needed to begin sharing his message with the eunuch. It will not always be that easy, or that obvious; however, we need to take note of his method of sharing in order to be ready to share our message when the time is right. These guidelines emerge concerning the sharing of the message.

1. Philip's message was a message about Jesus Christ. Philip was able to very nicely relate

this message to that which the eunuch was studying and that which was familiar within his life. It takes skill and practice to be able to do this as well as Philip did it, but this should be our goal. There are many messages we could share today, and often we are tempted to go down some of these roads and spend our time talking about different views of the Bible, the miracles, etc. Somewhere along the line, we need to become adept at sharing the message about Jesus Christ in a meaningful way that speaks to the other person's need, as happened here with Philip.

2. Philip's message called for some deciding on the part of the hearer. As Philip shared the message about Jesus the eunuch was led to express interest in going further with this person, Jesus, as expressed in his desire for baptism. Philip rightfully pointed out to the eunuch that which called for a decision. The eunuch must give his "whole heart" to the matter. Philip's question, "if you believe with all your heart" (V 37) is one we need to focus on as we challenge students to follow Him.
3. Philip delivered a message of joy and hope. Read verse 39 again. It does not say that following his baptism he became a Christian and "never smiled again". Some people have the idea that following Jesus as Lord is one dreary and dreadful task, and a person would be out of their mind to do something like that. Unfortunately, they have gotten this idea from those of us who are the Christians of today.

Some of my best memories after nearly 25 years of working with students are of the mission trips. Those trips over spring break to

the Indian Pueblos near Española, New Mexico, the stories told and changed lives observed as summer missionaries returned, and even the special activities we have done to raise the money to send students on mission are strong points in my pilgrimage with students. Let's work on becoming a caring group from which God can call some daring persons to go to the erring ones in our world and be about the task of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. To do less is to cheat the students and ourselves, and even more important, to disappoint God.

Note: Scripture quoted is from the NAS edition. Summer mission statistics quoted from HMB Official Statistics.

**HMB
OFFICIAL SUMMER MISSIONS STATISTICS
1984-1988**

	<u>1984</u>	<u>1985</u>	<u>1986</u>	<u>1987</u>	<u>1988</u>
HMB Paid (Includes Semester Missionaries Serving in Summer)	750	692	739	684	722
HMB Insured	8	8	14	17	21
BSU In-state	365	350	298	337	310
BSU Regular	<u>421</u>	<u>435</u>	<u>390</u>	<u>370</u>	<u>359</u>
	1,544	1,485	1,441	1,408	1,412

Colleges Represented in 1988 — 388
Seminaries Represented in 1988 — 2
(Southern and Southwestern)