



## On your marks

In the Acts of the Apostles, we can read of how individuals were used by God to help the story of Jesus spread around the world, from its beginnings at Pentecost in Jerusalem. Because the church expanded so quickly, new leaders had to be appointed to help manage the growing congregation in the capital. Philip was originally such a new leader. However, he soon found himself becoming an evangelist in the district of Samaria – and then called by God to meet with an important official travelling back to Africa. Clearly, Philip was open to being used in whichever way God wanted – and his encounter with the treasurer is traditionally seen as how the gospel first travelled to the country of Ethiopia.

## Get set

You will need:

- four small umbrellas from a pound shop
- coconut shells or something similar to make the sound of horses' hooves
- an enlarged page from a Bible
- items for junk modeling
- paper and small round pieces of dowel (to make a scroll)
- bowl and some water

You can find the story in Acts 8:26-40.

## Go!

### 1. Opening up the story

- The treasurer was puzzled by what some verses from the Old Testament meant. He was reading these when Philip arrived at his chariot's side. Enlarge a photocopy of a page from the Bible and then cut it up into many sections so that it is difficult to work out which story it is. Hide these around your room and set everybody off to find as many pieces as they can to try and put it together and discover which Bible story it is.
- The Ethiopian treasurer was clearly a believer in God and had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Perhaps it was there that he had begun to read the book of Isaiah. He was reading his souvenir copy on his way home! Talk with your group about trips they have made to far-off places – and what presents they brought back home. Do they have any souvenirs that carry particular meaning and special memories? Someone may even have been to Africa – What did they bring back to remember their trip?
- Prepare for the acting out of this story (see below) by challenging your group to become combined human sculptures of different objects from the story – for example, a chariot, a horse, a palm tree or a desert pool.

## 2. Telling the story

This story can be acted out even with a small group, with some people doubling up for different scenes. However, if you have a larger group, why not go for a large-scale dramatic reconstruction of the story, as follows:

- four people with small cheap umbrellas for chariot wheels
- four people to be horses for chariot with coconut shell sound effects
- four or more people to be servants to run behind chariot
- one person to be the treasurer holding a scroll (with perhaps a small section from Isaiah 53 in an easy-to-read version on it?)
- one person to be Philip, who runs around trying to catch the treasurer up
- six or more people sitting in a circle holding hands to be a pool of water - it is here that the treasurer will be baptised
- four or more people to be palm trees

End the story with Philip running off, as he disappears in the direction of Caesarea to raise a family with four daughters (his next challenge from God!).

As you create each element, tell the story of what happened on the desert road south.

## 3. Talking about the story

As Bible stories can be puzzling, we often need help to understand what they mean, and to see how the stories in the Old Testament link up with those in the New Testament. However, it isn't enough just to read the stories and understand them, but rather to do something about them. The treasurer in this story went on to know God in a new, deeper way and he in turn took the story of Jesus to his home in Africa.

- What Bible versions have you got at home that help you to read and understand its stories?
- What are your favourite Bible stories?
- Which Bible stories do you find puzzling?
- Has anyone ever helped you to understand what a Bible story might mean?
- Have you ever helped anyone else to understand a Bible story?
- What help is there available to make sense of some of the more difficult parts of the Bible?
- When do you think is the best time to read your Bible?
- Do you prefer reading the Bible on your own or with others?
- Have you ever read something in the Bible that has challenged you to do something about it?

## 4. Playing with the story

The treasurer's chariot must have been quite a grand one, especially as he worked for the Queen of Ethiopia. As a group task, create your own royal chariot for the treasurer to ride in using some cardboard boxes and other pieces of junk.



Alternatively, using paper and pieces of wood, create the scroll that the treasurer was reading. You could include the verses from Isaiah 53 or print off some Hebrew words from Isaiah from the Internet.

### 5. **Reflecting on the story**

It seems that those who decided to follow Jesus in the stories in Acts didn't have to go on long courses before they could be baptised! In this story, Philip took advantage of the fact that they were passing a small oasis with a pool of water to invite the treasurer to make this act of starting again as he was washed in its water.

Jesus invites everyone to start again like this, not only when they are baptised, but every day when they can revisit and renew their baptism vows.

Gather your group around a bowl with some water (or perhaps you could make use of a font in your church). Pour water into the bowl or font and use this sound and sight as a prompt to invite everyone to renew their baptism promises to God. For example:

**Do you turn to Christ?** *I turn to Christ*

**Do you repent of your sins?** *I repent of my sins*

**Do you renounce evil?** *I renounce evil*

There may be other promises particular to your church that you would like everyone to renew as you bring this session to a close.