

Unlikely Friendships (Acts 8)

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[0 : 00] Hi, so I'll be reading Acts chapter 8 and I'll be reading from the NLT version. Saul was one of the witnesses and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen.

A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem, and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria. Some devout men came and buried Stephen with great mourning, but Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison.

But the believers who were scattered preached the good news about Jesus wherever they went. Philip, for example, went to the city of Samaria and told the people there about the Messiah. Crowds listened intently to Philip because they were eager to hear his message and see the miraculous signs he did. Many evil spirits were cast out, screaming as they left their victims.

[1 : 02] And many who had been paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was a great joy in the city. A man named Simon had been a sorcerer there for many years, amazing the people of Samaria and claiming to be someone great.

Everyone, from the least to the greatest, often spoke of him as the Great One, the Power of God. They listened closely to him because for a long time he had astounded them with his magic. But now the people believe Philip's message of good news concerning the Kingdom of God in the name of Jesus Christ. As a result, many men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself believed and was baptized.

He began following Philip wherever he went. And he was amazed by the signs and great miracles Philip performed. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted God's message, they sent Peter and John there.

As soon as they arrived, they prayed for these new believers to receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them, for they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

[2 : 11] Then Peter and John laid their hands upon these believers, and they received the Holy Spirit. When Simon saw that the Spirit was given, when the apostles laid their hands on people, he offered them money to buy this power.

Let me have this power too, he exclaimed, so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit. But Peter replied, May your money be destroyed with you, for thinking God's gift can be bought.

You can have no part in this, for your heart is not right with God. Repent of your wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive your evil thoughts, for I can see that you are full of bitter jealousy and are held captive by sin.

Pray to the Lord for me, Simon exclaimed, that these terrible things you said won't happen to me. After testifying and preaching the word of God in Samaria, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, and they stopped in many Samaritan villages along the way to preach the good news.

As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, Go south, down the desert road that runs in Jerusalem to Gaza. And he started out, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Kandake, the queen of Ethiopia.

[3 : 28] The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

The Holy Spirit said to Philip, Go over and walk along beside the carriage. Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Philip asked, Do you understand what you are reading? The man replied, How can I, unless someone instructs me? And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him. The passage of the scripture he had been reading was this, He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. He was humiliated and received no justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth. The eunuch asked Philip, Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?

[4 : 27] So beginning with this same scripture, Philip told him the good news about Jesus. As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, Look, there's some water.

Why can't I be baptized? He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When he came out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Meanwhile, Philip found himself farther north at the town of Azotus. He preached the good news there, and in every town along the way, until he came to Caesarea.

And that is the word of God. Thank you, Angel, and thank you for reading that so well.

It's good to have a speech therapist, actually, to read the word God's word, isn't it? So, yeah, thank you so much for the privilege of opening up Acts chapter 8 with you. Please keep that open in your Bibles, or if you haven't already turned it on, it would be great if you can be there.

[5 : 32] We're going to hear from God's word as we listen through this chapter again. Let's pray, shall we? Let's ask the Lord to help us through this very important chapter.

Heavenly Father, your word gives life. It gives hope. It is living and active. And though we may fear how it cuts us today, we ask that you would cut us deep.

Bring us repentance from our sins and faith in the risen Lord Jesus. By the power of your Holy Spirit, we pray all these things. Amen. Date night for us is on Fridays, but family night is on Mondays.

This is how I work out the days of the week in my life. And so tomorrow night is family night. And on family night, we watch movies together often.

We might play a board game. It depends what the kids want to do, of course. But since date night, I've been asked, what movie are we watching for family night? And one of the movies we have watched, which the kids love, is this movie called Up.

[6 : 46] Anyone watch this one before? Yep, okay. It's funny. When I ask them, the Sunday morning service, I think there were like two or three people that put their hands up. I think they just watch other kinds of movies, I'm sure.

And the movie, of course, for those who don't know the movie, it's a lovely story, right? An elderly man, recently widowed, he decides to start going through his bucket list, right?

And he decides to fly to South America. Except he does this by, he's a balloon salesman, so he ties thousands of helium balloons to his house, and he thinks he's on his way to South America, and then by mistake, he brings along with him on the house, Russell, a young wilderness explorer.

There he is. And you know, part of the story's charm, right, if you've watched this, is that the two main characters are so different. One is a young boy, kind of like, maybe Kiwi Asian, if he was a New Zealander.

The other is a grumpy grandfather. That's a very unlikely friendship that moves the story along. Whether it's cats and dogs, whether it's someone crash landing on you, look, unlikely friendships are what drives a story along, aren't they?

[8 : 00] And here in Acts chapter 8, we have just heard, not just one, but two examples of very unlikely friendships. In fact, where lines are crossed that haven't been crossed before.

In fact, lines that have been crossed that we should be glad have been crossed. We should be glad these boundaries have been broken, because it's the reason why we can sit here today, as PCBC English.

It's the reason why any one of you here today can be welcomed into God's kingdom. So let's take a closer look at this chapter. Today's message actually kicks off a new kind of mini-series in the book of Acts.

I think it's good to see the book of Acts in three main parts, and now we are from 8 to 12, in a new section, okay, of what God is doing through the risen Lord Jesus.

I want to be remembered what Jesus told his disciples way back in chapter 1, before he ascended into heaven. In fact, you should remember, because we memorized this verse, right? Let's have a go.

[9:01] 1, 2, 3. Acts chapter 1, verse 8 says, But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Well done. Well done. Good effort. All right. Maybe some review needed. Look, this is the key verse of the whole book. Can you see the three sections divided up for us?

Because I wonder if you have noticed, right, in the first seven chapters, which you've already heard, how Jewish the church has been so far. The first apostles, like Peter and John, they were ethnically Jew.

The 120 men and women who were united in prayer in Pentecost, they were Jews. The 3,000 who devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, this early church that broke bread and prayed together, they were Jewish.

Or maybe they converted to Judaism from other nations. In fact, right up to Stephen's stoning, everything has actually happened in the story so far in Jerusalem.

[10:15] But finally, Acts chapter 8, verse 1, the story shifts. Unexpected people follow Jesus, like Simon the sorcerer and the Ethiopian eunuch.

But look how it's, because of something, unexpected, right? Verse 1 says this, On that day, a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem. Recently, I read an interview where they interviewed Olena Zelenska.

She's the first lady of Ukraine, so married to the president. When she woke up on the 24th of February, the two words that her husband said to her was this, it started.

Bombs raining down on her hometown, Russian soldiers storming the streets, the war in Ukraine had begun, you see. And look, here in chapter 8 of the book of Acts, two words, are needed.

It started. Stephen's death seems to kickstart an open attack on the early Christian church. People like Saul, which we'll hear about next week, beginning to destroy the church, right?

[11:24] Verse 3, it's a very strong word there, dragging men and women to prison. And so no surprise, it's because of this that people disperse from Jerusalem.

Except, there's a group of people who didn't disperse. Did you notice? Who didn't go? All except the apostles, verse 1 says. We're scattered. It's a bit strange, isn't it?

I think if we want to read our Bible as well, we should clue in and go, hmm, what's going on here? Imagine if Zelensky told his wife, go, go, go to a safe place with the children. Nah, I'll stay here, thanks. It's a bit odd, isn't it?

We want to pay attention. Except the apostles. In fact, while the apostles are staying in Jerusalem, it's kind of someone from the caring department that breaks boundaries with the gospel, isn't it? It's this man called Philip. He's one of the servants, remember Acts 6, one of the seven that were picked to help the widows with a daily distribution. And here Luke names him as one of those who had been scattered.

[12:27] That's what he says here in verse 4. And, verse 3, it says that, you know, with the other disciples, he's preaching the word wherever he goes. And even going down to a city in Samaria to proclaim the Messiah there.

And you know what? Based on their response that we heard, right, how did they respond? Right? Joyfully, verse 6 to 8 says, okay, there was just a massive revival.

Perhaps if we were there, we would have asked Philip, why didn't you go sooner? You know? This is great. Why didn't you go tell them the gospel sooner? Here we need to really understand what's going on culturally.

You need to understand how reluctant, in fact, how scared, in fact, how taboo it was for Jewish people to enter Samaria. It would have been like a South Korean entering North Korea.

Or if you're a Harry Potter fan, it would be like Draco Malfoy, the pure blood, dating Hermione Granger, whose dad's a muggle. The tension between Jews and Samaritans, actually, it goes right back almost a thousand years.

[13:37] 930 BC, there was a civil war, right? And we've just read about this at home as a family. And the kingdom splits, right? South is Judah, north is Israel. And the northern tribes, they break off and they set up a rival temple, a rival kingdom, and it becomes called Samaria.

So that's, that's kind of this grudge match that has gone on since that time. And so, it's when, that's why when Jesus meets, for example, the Samaritan woman, right, in John chapter 4, and offers her living water, the apostle John, when he writes this, has to spell out, for the Jews don't associate with Samaritans.

And for nearly a thousand years, they did not. So, perhaps we could sympathize at least with the apostles when they stayed put.

And yet now, now in history, Philip is in Samaria. He is preaching the gospel to them, proving Jesus is Lord with great signs and miracles and wonders and healing.

And the worst part is the Samaritans are believing. They are responding. They are coming to Jesus. But maybe we shouldn't be so surprised.

[14:54] After all, Philip, if you remember, it's a Greek name. He's possibly a Greek-speaking Jew. He's possibly someone who lives between two cultures like some of you.

Sometimes it takes the immigrant, perhaps, to try what locals might not. Sometimes it's scattered people who scatter God's word. And maybe it's this next younger generation who take risks that the first generation don't.

But make no mistake, here, a line's been crossed in Samaria. A new stage of God's mission has started. The gospel is now spreading beyond Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria as promised, as ordered by Jesus.

And so, in the rest of the chapter, actually, really, what we see are two examples of this new stage. And two unexpected friendships.

And so, the first person we meet is an unlikely follower. And his name is Simon. He's a sorcerer. So we see that from verse 9 to 25 in chapter 8.

[16:00] Now, let's talk about magic. Magic, and I have some gifts, but magic tricks isn't one of them. So I have no magic trick to prepare for you right here. And that's okay. But if I did, you might think I was really, really powerful.

Because that's how magic used to be thought of. And perhaps still, even today. Okay? If you have a friend that can do a card trick, that's amazing. They can catch your attention.

You might even want to go out with them. I don't know. Magic and power often go together. In the Old Testament, the Pharaoh of Egypt do you remember he used magicians to prove his power over God's people.

I don't know if you've ever seen videos of people doing magic tricks. I watched one recently where David Copperfield seemed to walk through the Great Wall of China. How did he do it?

He became an instant celebrity from that moment on. To amaze people is to have power over them sometimes. And Simon is a man like this.

[16:58] Right? In verse 9 to 11, that's what we're told. We are told just how amazing his magic was. How everyone would pay attention to him. They even called him the great power of God.

But then Philip comes in. He brings the good news of Jesus. And then all these Samaritans who were amazed at Simon before are now amazed at Jesus.

Jesus. And you can't explain away, look, thousands of men and women rejoicing in Jesus as a magic trick. There is something amazing going on here. Simon knows this.

He is a professional magician and he is now amazed himself. Once he amazed others, now he is amazed himself. That's what verse 13 tells us, right? He is amazed. I think Luke, right, he could have chosen lots of people in Samaria to focus on.

I think he chooses Simon's story because it is, it's just so unlikely, isn't it? It's so unlikely. And we need to know this too. Not only do magic and power go together, in those times so did magic and false worship.

[18:09] I think this situation would be kind of similar to if maybe a Hindu priest encountered the all-powerful king. Or maybe an atheist professor discovers her maker and redeemer.

It's that kind of unlikely encounter with the Lord Jesus here. And so it's great just to remember and Luke wants us to remember don't underestimate the power of the gospel.

Don't underestimate the power of the gospel. Jesus offers amazing grace for all kinds of unlikely people. In fact, even now, you might have someone in mind and you think, there's no way that they would come to church.

There's no way that I could tell them about Jesus. I want you to rule that thought out because here we are reminded Jesus offers amazing grace for all kinds of unlikely people.

Well, Philip's experiencing this firsthand but look, the kinds of things happening in Samaria, they were so unlikely that verse 14 tells us when the apostles in Jerusalem, they heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they had to send Peter and John down to Samaria to check it out.

[19 : 27] Here is a clear work of the Holy Spirit, is it not? Okay, lives transformed, people coming to Jesus and this is a theme that's going to come and become really big in the book of Acts.

The question is this, will the apostles, will the church, the establishment church in Jerusalem? Are they going to welcome this move of the Spirit or are they not to be continued?

This is a question that's going to come up again but for now, I think the answer is yes, they welcome it. They welcome it. Verse 14 to 17 tell us Peter and John, well, they come and they talk to the Samaritans and they pray for them to receive the Holy Spirit and they do.

God gives his seal of approval he says, yes, my spirit is for the Samaritans too, not just the Jews. Praise God. But, I wonder if you noticed, right, because Luke spells it out, these events bring up a bit of a tricky question.

How could the Samaritans be baptized and yet not yet receive the Holy Spirit? Was there a moment where there were still second class citizens? Or perhaps is this passage teaching us that we all need a Holy Spirit baptism after a water baptism?

[20 : 48] I'm really grateful for our more charismatic and Pentecostal brothers and sisters among us. I think what we believe on this is on a spectrum, okay, and so it's not wise to just group people in one category or another, especially, I know that for myself as well.

And I may be wrong, but I think the best way to read what's happening here is to see this as a unique one-time event. I want us to remember back to Acts chapter 2.

What did we see there? Pentecost Sunday. There was a one-off, couldn't be repeated exactly again, outpouring of God's Spirit among the nations. Did you remember that?

that empowered the church to kick off the gospel work, to share the gospel, to start the church.

There was a special one-off sign of the Spirit to show that there was a move happening.

The church was born. And I think here is a special one-off sign of the Spirit that shows a key ethnic boundary has been crossed. I think here in Samaria we have God saying, I want to welcome far-off people into the kingdom.

[22 : 03] And in fact, I'm going to show you in Jerusalem that these are your brothers and sisters. In fact, I want you to know this so much that I want you to be the ones to witness the Holy Spirit coming on them.

I could have sent the Holy Spirit straight away. I want you to see this for yourself because you need to see that these are your brothers and sisters now. Does that make sense?

I think this is a key special moment where they just had to be there. They just had to be there. I'll try and give an analogy. Once someone asked me that watched the live stream of one of our English services and they said, wow, who's that person with the white hair I saw on the English service live stream?

I was like, who's got white hair here? Who's got white hair here? Do you have one? And then, you know, just like, yay, hi. And then finally I realised, oh, that's Alexis.

That's great. She dyed her hair white. And then she said, oh, okay, that's fine. I thought there was some older people at English service and I thought I might come along and check it out sometime.

[23 : 07] And then I was like, yes, you should because there are older people here. There are all kinds of people here. So come along. All right? Yes, but you have to come see it for yourself. Okay?

I think that's what this Holy Spirit moment is all about. Yes, the Samaritans are in. Come and see for yourself. I'm going to show you the baptism so that you have no doubt that God has welcomed them in too.

I'm going to leave a lot of other questions aside unsaid. You can talk to me later. I do believe and we've seen that we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a vital part of our everyday experience as Christians.

But I think in this verse, I don't think it's teaching a second baptism that every person needs separate to being included in Christ. I want to assure you this because if you turn from your sins and put your trust in the Lord Jesus as your Savior, I want to assure you you have everything you need for life in Christ.

If you put your trust in Jesus, you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. That is the Bible speaking. Ephesians 1.13 Guaranteed, included in Christ. Absolutely. So that's our aside about the spiritual

works of the Holy Spirit.

[24 : 29] But I think actually more important than that is kind of the response we see straight after, isn't it? Right? What happens in verse 18 to 25 is that Simon, poor Simon, poor Simon, he says, he sees this amazing one-off experience and he goes, I want a piece of that.

That sounds pretty good. And he goes to his old ways. He says, I want to buy this kind of spiritual power. Can I pay some money for this? And so Peter has to rebuke him.

Right? Verse 20. May your money perish with you because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money. This is a stern warning for us, any of us.

God does not work like a genie. We cannot buy favor with God. He's not a credit card you pay off and then you get into his kingdom.

Our wealth or status, our gifts do not give us a better place before God. We need to remember this. The greatest gift that God has already given us to all who believe is the priceless gift of his son, Jesus Christ.

[25 : 40] Do you believe this? He should. He died on a cross for Simon's sins, for Philip's sins, for your sins, for my sins.

And so Peter's words in verse 22 is so important. Repent of this wickedness. Pray to the Lord in the hope he may forgive you. It's so important. That is always how we come to Jesus.

Not with gifts, not with our wealth, not with our prestige. We come to him with repentance and faith. You can even do that today if you've never done so, ever.

Everyone comes into God's kingdom broken, in need of grace, whether rich or poor, whether sorcerer or Samaritan. And as Peter and John, they part ways with Philip, it seems like at least for now, these two Jerusalem apostles have learned their lesson.

Right? Because look what verse 25 tells us. Right? So there's part ways. Philip hits the desert road to Gaza and Peter and John that go back up to Jerusalem. And verse 25 tells us what did they do?

[26 : 45] They went preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages. Praise God. The gospel advancing. The gospel advancing. And look, now, if they'd read their Bibles carefully, perhaps they would have done this really, really much sooner than they have.

Because, and this is a bit of background, hundreds of years before these events, the prophet Isaiah had foretold of a Messiah, a promised one.

In their own religious texts was a prophet who would call and predict a suffering servant, someone who would be pierced for our transgressions, who would be crushed for our iniquities, our sins.

But, this same prophet also said things like this. He said, all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

Or translated, all the earth will know that I am God. Or this, right, Isaiah 55, verse 5, surely you will summon nations you know not and nations who don't know that you don't know will come running to you.

[27 : 56] You see, right through the books of the prophets there is this hope, there is this expectation that when the Lord comes to save it will be a salvation for the nations.

Not just Israel, but for the nations. All throughout Israel's history, this is important, none Israelites had to worship differently to people who were descended directly from Abraham.

all through the history up till now, there was a distinction between ethnically Jewish people and everyone else.

Imagine coming to church and being told, welcome, you can stand in the car park, you can't come closer. If you were a foreigner, not a Jew, under the old covenant, that was what worship was like.

If you were physically imperfect, that was what worship was like, car park worship. If you were unclean in some way, that was what worship was like, car park worship.

[29 : 01] Okay? And Isaiah actually, in contrast to that expectation, that practice, did say this though, and we should pay special attention here.

This is Isaiah 56, verse 3. Let no foreigner who is bound to the Lord say, the Lord will surely exclude me from his people. And let no eunuch complain, I am only a dry tree.

You see, when the Messiah comes, the promised one, you can be bound to the Lord and included in his people, and you don't have to be just Jewish. If I was an apostle and knew my Bible, I should have known this.

If I was Philip the evangelist traveling around, I should have known this. But if they didn't, they're about to get an object lesson. Because in the rest of the chapter, who do we meet?

We meet an unlikely Baptist. Here, we see the Ethiopian eunuch. I think this is where, I think, if you read your Bibles, you just got to have to pause and say, God, you have a sense of humor, don't you?

[30 : 04] Right? They're just wrestling about who can be included in God's church, and look who drives past. A foreign eunuch. An Ethiopian. A servant of Queen Candace.

Just like Isaiah 56, verse 3, predicted. And where has he come from? It tells us, doesn't it? He's come from worshiping. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship.

Right? So, he's just experienced car park worship. Right? At the temple that the leaders wanted to protect. That's why they killed Stephen, you remember. But like every other foreigner, okay, Eddie, let's call him Eddie, he would only have been allowed no further than the car park.

But then actually, if you think about it, Eddie is not just Eddie. He's unable to have children, right, because of his role in the Queen's Court. He would have been doubly excluded. Okay?

He's not just in the car park. He's watching the live stream in the car park. And now, he's riding his chariot. He's going home. Don't know about you.

[31 : 08] On long car rides, what do you do? A podcast, maybe an audio book. He's got an audio book on. And the audio book is set to Isaiah the prophet. And the spirit, amazing moment, says to Philip, go.

Go to that chariot. Stay near it. And so he does, right? And he hears him reading aloud. Now, guess where from? Isaiah 53. About the suffering servant who will bring peace and joy to the whole world, even a eunuch, right?

And so here, the eunuch is longing to know, who is this person? Who is this person that the scriptures I've been hearing speak about? Thank God that Philip is keen to make an unlikely friendship at this point, right?

Thank God that he begins from this very passage of scripture and tells him about the good news of the Lord Jesus. Wouldn't that be fun to ride shotgun with them and kind of listen in on their conversation?

Maybe it would have gone like this. Hey, Eddie, let me tell you what you're reading about. This verse, it's great news for someone just like you. You, you struggle to fit in.

[32 : 22] You, you're looking for answers. Well, it's a new age now. And let me tell you about Jesus. He forgives everyone's sin. Your sin, my sin.

He invites people like you out of the car park and gives you a front row seat in God's kingdom. Who knows? Maybe that's what the conversation would have gone like.

And maybe from Isaiah 53, he would have gone to 54, 55, 56, and who knows? Maybe he would have heard himself fulfilled because when they drive past some water in the desert, it seems like the eunuch is ready to go all in, right?

Amazing response, right? Look, here's water. What prevents me from being baptized? Right? This amazing kingdom you've been telling me about, why can't I join it right now? Why can't I show I'm a follower of King Jesus now?

And so, they park on the side of the road, they get in the water, and Philip, verse 38, baptizes him. And as soon as he's added to the church, boom, the Spirit sends him their separate ways, rejoicing.

[33 : 35] What an incredible picture of the power of God's word and an unlikely friendship. Can you see that, friends? God's word and an unlikely friendship.

What amazing things it can do. This is a pattern I think every single Christian can follow. We may not have a chariot to follow. You might not have an Ethiopian eunuch as a best mate, but you can do this.

You can strike up a relationship and you can bring God's word to the situation, to the friendship. It will not return empty. Now, some of you, maybe you're good Baptists, you might be wondering, how much water did they use?

Did they sprinkle or immerse? Luke doesn't care, does he? Because we don't find out. If it was important enough, he would have told us from this passage. Look, I think Luke at this point wants to challenge us with something far more important.

How big is your view of God's kingdom? Is there room in your view of church for this kind, these kinds of unlikely friendships? Because we live in a new age now.

[34 : 44] God's kingdom is bigger, far bigger than one ethnic group. Do you believe this? Do you believe this? Someone, a sister, pointed out to me last week, in our official church name, there's

actually only one word that's actually compulsory.

Church. Yes, we're in Pakaranga. Yes, we have Chinese people among us. Yes, we are Baptists by conviction. Church. We are a church of the risen Lord Jesus.

The rest are helpful descriptions, but they do not define us ultimately. And if they don't define us ultimately, then they should not stop us from pursuing unlikely friendships for God's kingdom.

And so let me leave you with two applications. Because if the early church was full of unlikely friendships, then the first thing we should do is cross boundaries to share the good news of Jesus. Should we not? Let's make unlikely friendships to share the good news of Jesus. Can I ask you, when was the last time you and I took a risk like Philip? Who is someone in your life that you can ask?

[35 : 51] Can I journey with you? Can I hear what you're reading? Can I explain Jesus to you from what you're listening to? It might not be Isaiah 53, but it could be the New York Times.

It could be their Facebook feed. It could be whatever movie they've watched recently. How do we help them get from there to the Lord Jesus who will fulfill every desire of their heart? Or when did you come to church not just assuming that everyone here is okay?

Maybe there's a visitor that has never heard about the risen Lord Jesus. Can I challenge you? Come here eager to make friends and to make disciples. Wouldn't that be amazing? Wouldn't that be amazing?

Let's not just stay in our Jerusalem, okay? Our comfort zones. Could we cross boundaries? Could we make an unlikely friendship to share the good news of Jesus at school, at your workplace, in your family banquets?

And secondly, and finally, if the early church was full of unlikely friendships, then PCBC, we need to make unlikely friendships that will strengthen our church.

[37 : 04] We've been around as a PCBC English for nearly three years now, praise God. And so how are we going at accepting and including others who are different to us?

Honest question. If Simon the sorcerer showed up at our front door, would you panic? If an African brother or sister wanted to worship the Lord with us, would you tell them to stay in the car park?

Let's not be PCBC. Let's not be Pakaranga Clicky Baptist Church, please. Can I challenge you, right, to not stick with your same old friend group here on Sundays.

You'll see them again. I'm sure you will. Can I challenge you? Pray each Sunday you come in that who you're going to talk to, who you'll make feel valued, who you'll encourage.

It may mean not sitting in the same spot every week. It may mean mixing and mingling, going out of your comfort zone to say hi. But if we build up our church this way through unlikely friendships, imagine what God could do.

[38 : 09] Imagine how the kingdom of God could grow and prosper through here to the rest of Pakaranga and beyond. Wouldn't it be great if each of us committed to make one, at least one, unlikely friendship this year with a brother or sister here among us?

Would that be good? Would that be good? Because, look, if Jesus doesn't just say hi to us, he welcomes us into his kingdom, right, Romans 15, verse 7, maybe we can welcome others as part of our family too.

turning 30 this year, right, and so maybe now as a good time as any to commit ourselves to being a family not just of people that think the same or look the same.

Can we be a family full of unlikely friendships for God's kingdom? Can we be a place that welcomes people of different cultures, ethnicities, backgrounds, life stages together in the name of Jesus to enter a new era of God's mission?

Would that be quite unlikely? I don't know. By God's grace, let's pray into that. Father, you know our hearts.

[39 : 24] We are like birds who love to flock together if we are the same. So forgive us for all the times we have done that at the expense of your glory, at the expense of your beauty to display the manifold, multicolored wisdom of your church among us.

Would you help us to make an unlikely friendship with someone, whether today, but certainly in this year to come? Would you help us to cross boundaries, be bold to bring Jesus to people and places that need your gospel to renew and to revive and restore broken hearts, difficult situations?

And would you help us do all this for the glory of your name? We pray all these things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.