

“Together” – Week 4

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2026 - MICHAEL BOWERS



Summary - "Together on Mission"

Week 4 brings the Together in Christ series to its sending point. For three weeks, the sermon has painted a picture of a church that was together in Christ and together in life – praying, elevating Scripture, and devoted to the apostles' teaching. Now the story turns outward. In Acts 8, persecution breaks out in Jerusalem and the believers are scattered. Luke's word is a farming word: to sow seed throughout. What was meant to silence the church planted it across the map instead. Philip, a man first chosen to serve widows, carries the gospel into Samaria, and joy spreads through the city. Then the Spirit sends him somewhere stranger – a desert road toward Gaza – where he runs alongside the chariot of an Ethiopian official reading Isaiah. Philip crosses every line his culture had drawn: ethnic, national, social. The official believes, is baptized, and carries the good news home to a land weeks away. The sermon's point is simple and searching: never underestimate obedience. Philip wasn't finished growing, but he went. The call to us is the same. We gather to be equipped, we walk together for accountability, and then we scatter – into homes, classrooms, ball fields, and workplaces across this region – as disciples who make disciples.

Scripture - Acts 8:4–8, 26–40 (ESV)

4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. 5 Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. 6 And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was much joy in that city. . . . 26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. 27 And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." 30 So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" 31 And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 32 Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. 33 In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." 34 And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. 36 And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" 38 And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. 39 And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Daily Reflection Questions (Use T.R.U.T.H. below)

DAY 1 | EXODUS 4:10-12 – "I'M NOT READY" ISN'T NEW. Long before anyone told a pastor "I'm not ready," Moses said it to God at the burning bush. Moses said, "I am slow of speech and of tongue." What is your version of that sentence – the specific reason you give for why you're not the one to talk about Jesus? God answered, "I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak." Who is one person – a coworker, friend, or family member – you would talk with about faith this week if you truly believed God would give you the words?

DAY 2 | ISAIAH 53:4-7 – THE PAGE THE ETHIOPIAN WAS READING. This is the very passage the Ethiopian official was reading when Philip ran up to his chariot (Acts 8:32-35). Beginning right here, Philip told him the good news about Jesus – the Servant who was pierced for our transgressions. Isaiah writes, "All we like sheep have gone astray . . . and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." How would you explain that sentence to someone who has never heard the gospel, using your own everyday words?

DAY 3 | MATTHEW 28:18-20 – GO WITH HIS AUTHORITY. Jesus begins with "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" before He ever says "Go." How does knowing the mission rests on His authority – not your skill – change the way you think about sharing your faith?

DAY 4 | ACTS 1:8 – FROM JERUSALEM TO THE END OF THE EARTH. Jesus names Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the end of the earth. What is your "Jerusalem" (the people closest to you), your "Samaria" (people you would naturally avoid), and your connection to the nations through praying, giving, welcoming, or going?

DAY 5 | EPHESIANS 4:11-16 – EQUIPPED FOR THE WORK. Paul says leaders are given "to equip the saints for the work of ministry." If ministry is your work and not just your pastors' work, what part of it belongs to you right now? The body grows "when each part is working properly." Is there a group, serving team, or ministry where your part has been missing? What is one step you could take to plug in this month?

Daily Real Time with God (T.R.U.T.H)

T TALK TO GOD IN PRAYER- Start by asking God to help you understand the text and prepare your heart.

R READ THE BIBLICAL TEXT- Read the initial text, then read it again to look for key words and context clarity.

U UNDERSTAND THE TEXT - Explore who wrote the book and their audience, examine verses around the text, or look up key words to better understand their meaning. Ask questions like: Is there a sin to avoid? A promise to claim? A command to obey? What does it teach about God?

T THINK ABOUT AND APPLY THE TEXT- How does this verse change the way you live? Is there an application or choice you need to make to live or think differently?

H HONOR GOD IN PRAYER- Pray through God's Honor/Adoration, God's Kingdom/Surrender, God's Provision/Gratitude, God's Forgiveness/Confession, and God's Power/Protection (see Matthew 6:5-15).

Tools for Further Study

- <https://www.blueletterbible.org/>
- <https://www.bibleref.com/>
- <https://www.gotquestions.org/>
- <https://answersingenesis.org/answers/>
- <https://gospelcoach.ai/>
- <https://carm.org/>

Key Thoughts

Harnessed Together: Radical Trust

About eighteen years ago, Pastor Michael went skydiving – strapped at 14,000 feet to a tandem instructor he had met 45 minutes earlier. Jumping out of a plane is crazy; trusting someone you have known for 45 minutes with your life is crazier. So why trust him?

- He had 2,000 jumps under his parachute
- He jumped 10-12 times every weekend
- He was licensed and trained
- He loved it – and couldn't wait to shove his passenger out of the plane

The jump required radical trust from the passenger, but a weightier responsibility from the instructor. And neither one jumped alone. That is the picture for this final week: the early church, together in Christ and together in life, now steps out together on mission.

"The invitation to walk closely with Jesus is linked with the command to go out with Jesus." – Nik Ripken – God is a sending God. We grow together, but we must remember we are on mission.

Scattered Seed (Acts 8:4-8)

Persecution in Jerusalem was meant to stop the Jesus movement. Instead, it scattered the believers – and everywhere they landed, they talked about Jesus. The word "scattered" is an agricultural term meaning to sow seed throughout.

- What threatened to silence their witness became the reason more people heard about Jesus
- Philip, first chosen to serve widows (Acts 6:5), left people who looked, talked, and believed like him and went into Samaria
- Crowds listened, people were healed and set free, and there was much joy in that city

Philip was ready for this because he had been shaped by the devotion and teaching of Acts 2:42-47. Like the skydiving instructor, he was trained, experienced, and passionate – about Jesus.

The Shape of Obedience (Acts 8:26-36)

God didn't leave Philip in a fruitful ministry in Samaria. He sent him to a desert road toward Gaza – the last watering place before the wilderness. Not the vacation destination. Philip's obedience had a shape:

- He went where the Spirit sent him – leaving comfort for the desert
- He crossed barriers – ethnic (Jew to Samaritan), national and racial (toward an African official), and social (toward a man of power and prominence)
- He ran – verse 30 says Philip ran to the chariot

Key Thoughts

The Ethiopian was reading Isaiah and asked, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" Starting from that very page, Philip told him the good news about Jesus, and the man was baptized that same day.

Never Underestimate Obedience (Acts 8:38-40)

The official went home rejoicing – weeks away in Ethiopia – carrying the gospel into new territory. The gospel traveled with and through the people who believed it. And we are scattered too:

- Neighborhoods – learning names, opening homes, noticing needs, making room for conversations about Jesus
- Schools – including the isolated, living with integrity, speaking honestly about faith
- Workplaces – working faithfully, listening carefully, speaking of Christ with humility and respect
- Ministry – foster care, building ramps, walking with people through addiction, sharing meals with neighbors
- The nations – praying, giving, sending, welcoming, and asking whether God is calling us to go

The map on the screen showed 47 zip codes across Davidson County and the edges of the surrounding counties. We are already scattered geographically. Are we living intentionally where God has placed us?

"Rich Fork Church family, you can be a Philip in someone's life." – Michael Bowers

How the Series Fits Together

Three movements tie the four weeks of this series together:

- Together in Christ – to be equipped (Ephesians 4:11-16). Leaders equip the saints for the work of ministry. Every believer belongs to the body, and every believer has a part – in dugouts, classrooms, and kitchen tables where no pastor will ever sit.
- Together in life – for accountability (Philippians 3:12-16). Paul hadn't arrived, but he pressed on. You don't have to reach full maturity before helping someone take a step of faith. Even Saul needed a Barnabas (Acts 9).
- Together on mission (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). Jesus' last words are a sending – under His authority, with His presence, by His Spirit's power.

When people are asked to serve or lead, the most common answer is "I'm not ready." We don't accept that from a tee-ball player learning how to hit for the first time. Nor do we accept that of a 25-year-old who still relies on training wheels to ride a bike. We push, we hold on, and we get the band-aids out, but the goal is that he learns how to ride.

"You're right; you are probably not ready, but neither was I. But will you be obedient? 'I'm not ready' and 'I'm fine' are both responses built on the absence of relationships." – Michael Bowers

Key Thoughts

Your Response: One Name, One Step, One Partner

This afternoon, the church covers this community – households, schools, ball fields, booster clubs, dance practices, and careers. Before the week is out, consider three things:

- One name – someone who needs to know Christ or grow in following Him. On the map, you are already there.
- One step – a conversation, an invitation, a shared meal, or time opening Scripture together
- One accountability partner – a believer who will pray with you, ask how you're doing, and push past "I'm fine"

"We are together in Christ, leading us to be together in life, and to scatter together on mission." – Michael Bowers

Guide Continues with weekly GRACE group questions on page 6

G.R.A.C.E Questions

ICE BREAKER: Skydiving: have you done it, would you do it, or is it a hard "absolutely not"? Bonus: what's one adventurous thing you did that your parents only found out about afterward? (The roller coaster you swore you'd never ride, a spring break road trip nobody approved, the time you "borrowed" the car – go.)

G – GIVE YOUR LIFE TO CHRIST - Surrender, both initially and daily.

- Pastor Michael trusted his tandem instructor because of experience, training, and passion – after knowing him for only 45 minutes. You've had far longer to know Jesus. Where is it hardest for you right now to let Him "pull the cord" instead of keeping your own hand on it?
- The Ethiopian asked, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" Who was the Philip in your story – the person who helped you understand Jesus? Could someone in your family or friend circle say that about you one day?

R – REAL TIME WITH GOD - Bible reading, prayer, scripture memory, journaling

- Philip started right where the Ethiopian was reading – Isaiah 53 – and told him about Jesus. If a coworker or neighbor asked you to explain one passage about Jesus, which one could you walk them through today? Which one do you wish you could?
- For "I don't know enough," the sermon prescribed three things: grow in prayer, pray for boldness, and let Scripture become your authority. Which of the three is weakest in your rhythm right now, and what's one specific change to your week that would strengthen it?

A – ACT IN OBEDIENCE - Following through on what God is teaching

- The sermon pointed out that "I'm not ready" rarely works anywhere else in life. Think of a specific time you've said it to God or the church. Was it really about readiness – or about fear, comfort, or time?
- Philip ran to the chariot. What step of obedience have you been walking slowly toward – a conversation with a coworker, an invitation to a neighbor, a meal with a family member? Name the step and the day you'll take it.

C – COMMIT TO COMMUNITY - Accountability, discipleship, doing life together

- Who in your life has permission to push past your "I'm fine"? If no name comes to mind quickly, what has made that kind of relationship hard for you to build?
- Barnabas lent his credibility to someone the church was afraid of. Is there a newer believer, a quiet small group member, or someone on the edges of the church you could stand beside this season?

E – ENGAGE YOUR WORLD - Stewardship of your life, influence, and mission

- Picture your dot on that map. Who lives, works, or plays near it – a neighbor, a teammate's parent, a coworker – who might hear about Jesus only because you are there?
- Philip crossed lines of ethnicity, nationality, and social class. Who in your world feels "across the line" from you – a different background, income, or season of life – and what's one way you could move toward them this month?

"Never underestimate obedience. The gospel was scattered by obedient believers."