

“How Can I Understand, Unless Someone Guides Me?”

Acts 8:26-40

We hear of this Ethiopian court official who had come to Jerusalem to worship. Ethiopia traditionally had a strong Jewish presence. The migration of Jews to Ethiopia happened in stages, but by the 7th Century BC, Judaism was the official state religion. It remained the official state religion for 1000 years until Ethiopian Emperor Ezana converted to Christianity around 330 AD – a few years after the Council of Nicaea.

Needless to say, an Ethiopian making a religious pilgrimage to Jerusalem was not out of the ordinary. As this man is beginning his journey back home, he is reading from the prophet Isaiah. In fact, he is reading the Song of the Suffering Servant from Isaiah 53. These can be some uncomfortable, confusing words if you don't know that they are pointing to Christ. This is the Old Testament reading each year on Good Friday. It points to Christ.

The Holy Spirit, working directly through Philip, has Philip run alongside the chariot. And he hears this man reading from the prophet Isaiah. In the ancient world, whenever you would read something, you always read it out loud. To read something quietly and keep it to yourself and not share it with others was considered very rude. It simply wasn't done.

So Philip hears this word of Scripture, this word which Christ has opened his mind to understand, and Philip asks the man, “Do

you understand what you are reading?” And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?”

Absolutely! How can you know or understand something unless someone teaches you. Earlier this week, I shared a post on Facebook on our Youngish Adults group page. It was an article concerning why many Millennials / also known as Generation Y/ the 35 and under crowd were abandoning life in the church. I made a comment concerning the author's argument for why this is happening as actually being part of the problem. The problem is a lack of understanding, a lack of faith, a lack of knowledge of God. Generation-Y is the least biblically literate generation since the 1500's.

The author of the article entitled “Don’t Take Me To Church” argues that young people are leaving the church because they don't like the hypocritical pastors or the hypocritical people in the church. And the author thought this was a legitimate reason. Think about it, why would it be right cast judgement upon God because of the actions of man? My need for God needs to be judged on the merits of God and what He has done for me. I commented that this is simply part of the ignorance that plagues this generation.

When I speak of ignorance, I did not intend to give any offence. Ignorance is simply a lack of knowledge or understanding. I am ignorant of a great many things because I have never been taught. I couldn't change a flat tire on my car. I am completely ignorant of how to even properly set up the jack. I say this to my shame. Concerning God and His Word, much of the blame for the ignorance of Generation-Y falls at the feet of the teachers and preachers and parents.

In the past 40+ years, serious study of the deep mysteries and majesty of God has given way to very superficial teaching all throughout our society. This is why it is important to be actively engaged with your children. Do you study God's Word? Do you share God's Word in your home with others? With your family in particular?

Be engaged with your children in worship. Teach them the liturgy. Teach them to speak and sing back to God the words of Scripture He has given. Teach them what adults do to worship God. Your children want to be treated like adults. Teach them what it means to be an adult Christian.

For the high school age Christian who has not been actively engaged in the Word of God outside of confirmation class, who no longer attends Sunday School, and whose memory of life in the church is mostly of going on scavenger hunts or to a "lock-in" with other youth, this person will undoubtedly look at the faith of their youth as something that they have "outgrown." And this paper-thin faith gets crushed in college. This is what has happened to Gen-Y.

I do not blame anyone for their lack of learning. "How can I understand, unless someone guides me?" The past couple of weeks, I have mentioned how we each have a sphere of influence. Your family, your children, these people you love – guide them concerning God's word of truth.

This requires that you have more than a paper-thin faith. But if you followed through on last week's challenge to ask your loved ones "what do you think will happen to you when you die?" If they

say they believe they will go to heaven, then ask them why they believe this.

As I am, unfortunately, confident that many of you received a variety of answers, I pray you understand that your loved ones are in the same position as the Ethiopian eunuch. “How can I understand, unless someone guides me?”

Take the time to be that guide. Seek out good resources, because, like we heard John say in his First Epistle, “do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.” If you aren’t sure how to begin, come talk to me. If your child was struggling in school; if your child was not understanding the math lesson and the instructions were confusing to you, would you ask the teacher for help? I don’t know any parents who wouldn’t. If math is that important, how important is the forgiveness of sins and eternal life?

Plumb the depths of the mind of Christ. The reality is that “the ways of God are unsearchable,” as Scripture says. My experience is that the deeper into theology I travel, the harder it is, because I am forced to look more intently into myself and examine myself – and I don't like what I see. However, the deeper into theology I travel, the more comfort I have known because I see how Christ has completely covered the ugliness of my sin. As I look back on my life, the more uncomfortable I became with my sinful self, the more comfort I knew in Christ.

We need to continue to grow in our understanding of the mysterious and hidden things of God. Understanding God does not come naturally in this sinful world. The question asked by the Ethiopian is the question for all of us, “How can I understand, unless someone guides me?” Amen.