The two larger bodies of water in Israel are the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea (or Salt Sea). These two bodies are connected by the Jordan River. While the Sea of Galilee has fresh sources of water emptying into it, it also has a mouth where water can exit. With a continual source of incoming water and a portal for outgoing water, the water there is fresh. The Dead Sea on the other hand has the incoming source of the Jordan, but no exit. In fact, the water stays stagnant and evaporates, leaving behind the salt, therefore making the water an inhospitable place (hence the site’s famous reputation for buoyancy). The fresh water of the Sea of Galilee allows for many sources of life, including bountiful fish, such that the fishermen of the Gospels loved to work there. Christ Himself spent much time near the Sea of Galilee! By contrast, the high salinity causes nothing to survive in the Dead Sea.

In the past couple of weeks, the study guide has been covering the power sources of discipleship. We have come to the third aspect: witnessing. When Christ’s disciples connect directly with these three power sources—prayer, Bible study, and witnessing—results are inevitable. Just like the bodies of water, our spiritual lives need sources of fresh water coming in as well as having an avenue for water to go out. This is not an option, but a necessity for healthy spirituality and discipleship.
Write out Acts 8:26–40 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, you may write out Acts 8:29–37. You may also re-write the passage in your own words, outline, or mind-map the chapter.
inGest

Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you

Draw Arrows to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?

Memorize your favorite verse in Acts 8:26–40. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

How can the principles from this account of Philip’s ministry be applied in your life

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PHILIP’S PRINCIPLES FOR POWER

In Acts 8, Philip is summoned by the angel of the Lord to reach out to the Ethiopian eunuch. Incidentally, the geographical context of the eunuch from Ethiopia corresponds with the advancement of the gospel as promised in Acts 1:8. “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Moreover, in this narrative, we see different evidences of God’s power when the principles of witnessing are upheld.

First, we see Philip’s attitude of service. Whether he was directed by an angel in Acts 8:26 or transported elsewhere in verses 39 and 40, the apostle is ready to serve as a teacher, preacher, or baptizer (cf. Matt. 28:18–20). When we purpose in our hearts to witness and serve others, we receive commensurate strength from God to meet that service.

Second, once we are open to the moving of the Holy Spirit, directions and opportunities for service are very specific. Verse 26 reads like GPS coordinates, where the angel knows of the direction, the road, and geography. The knowledge is not limited to space but is also in social circles. The eunuch is a man of great authority, working in the royal house of the Ethiopian queen. Surely his conversion would lead to more gospel opportunities abroad. Not only space and social opportunity are notable, but the timing of the rendezvous was also supernatural. The eunuch just happened to be reading the Hebrew Scriptures, and of all texts, the very chapter about the Suffering Servant, Jesus Christ, in Isaiah 53 (Acts 8:31–33).

Third, witnessing entails the usage of Scripture. While we are all called to be involved in service, whether it be humanitarian or community-oriented, we are also called to take service to the next step in our discipleship through the teaching of Scripture, should the opportunity avail itself. “The more one tries to explain the Word of God to others, with a love for souls, the plainer it becomes to himself. The more we use our knowledge and exercise our powers, the more knowledge and power we shall have” (Christ’s Object Lessons, 354).

Fourth, pointing people to Jesus is the ultimate goal of witnessing. Rather than focusing on theological and historical backgrounds or Bible trivia, Philip “preached Jesus to him” (Acts 8:35). “If we can awaken an interest in men’s minds that will cause them to fix their eyes on Christ, we may step aside, and ask them only to continue to fix their eyes upon the Lamb of God” (Maranatha, 99).

Last, witnessing is the context where cooperation and discipleship with Christ is seen in real time. Christ says, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:29). As a yoke helps two animals work together, disciples co-labor with Christ, and being empowered by His strength makes the burden light.

Human relationships, while important, are not sufficient to make disciples or retain them in the church. The power is in God and His Word. We must lead new converts to fix their eyes on Christ. For this reason, developing habits of prayer, Bible study, and witnessing forms the heart of a successful discipleship plan.

Read more at www.inversebible.org/disc05-3
The Bible greats each had their hearts burdened for people’s salvation. The heart for people was manifested by Moses when he said, “Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written” (Exod. 32:32). Paul said, “I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise” (Rom. 1:14). The Lord Jesus wept for the city, lamenting, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to you! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Matt. 23:37).

This heart wasn’t relegated to Bible characters alone; it continued on through Christian history. John Knox cried, “Give me Scotland or I die.” John Wesley declared, “I look upon all the world as my parish.” Upon landing in India as a missionary, Henry Martyn shouted, “Now let me burn out for God!” Billy Sunday prayed, “I want to be a giant for God.”

This heart isn’t relegated to famous Christians either. Many teachers pray for their students; pastors their parishioners; businesspeople their clients; physicians their patients; grandparents their grandchildren; and parents who weep over their prodigal children.

We may profess to have Jesus first in our lives, but our attitude toward witnessing reveals most clearly our level of discipleship and commitment to other priorities. While other concerns are important, the kingdom of God, its expansion of people, and the expansion of His righteousness should be our first priority (Matt. 6:33). Only when we make Him first do we give Him sovereignty over the rest of our lives and priorities. This is the only win-win scenario. Once we worry about our own needs, our priorities will naturally not be fulfilled by our human strength (Matt. 6:19, 20).

“The work above all work,—the business above all others which should draw and engage the energies of the soul,—is the work of saving souls for whom Christ has died. Make this the main, the important work of your life. Make it your special life-work. Cooperate with Christ in this grand and noble work, and become home and foreign missionaries. Be ready and efficient to work at home or in far-off climes for the saving of souls. . . . O that young and old were thoroughly converted to God, and would take up the duty that lies next them, and work as they have opportunity, becoming laborers together with God! Should this come to pass, multitudes of voices would show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light” (Sons and Daughters of God, 274).

Through prayer, ask the Lord to place a supernatural burden in your heart for another person. Look for opportunities to share Jesus with them. See what sicknesses (emotional, physical, and spiritual) they hold and lead them to Christ. Before asking for the burden, search your heart for whether you know Jesus yourself through the Scriptures and prayer. As we cannot effectively share someone we do not know personally, surrender your life to Christ and be a soul-winner.
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

2 Timothy 3:1–5
Luke 8:30–39
1 Peter 3:15

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with discipleship and witnessing?
In our physical life, it is easy for our dietary (feeding/reading) and breathing (air/prayer) habits to become routine. Sometimes they are so ordinary that we are not even conscious of these habits. If we continue to eat and breathe without exercise, there is the danger of becoming overweight. There is nothing like exercise to stimulate hunger, burn excess calories, and introduce a fresh lungful of oxygen into your bloodstream.

Spiritually, witnessing is fitness and exercise for the inner spiritual man. While the consequences of a lack of air or food are felt relatively quickly, the lack of exercise may not be manifested in the body until much later. Similarly, many Christians live a life of reading and studying with Bible and prayer but often do not feel the immediate need of ministry and witnessing. In the absence of evangelism, the body, though properly nourished with nutrients and oxygen, has no avenue of burning off the excess. As a result, the material gained is material wasted.

In the end, many Christians unconsciously die a spiritual death due to a lack of witnessing. They become sluggish, bored, unmotivated, depressed, and eventually spiritually obese, resulting in other psychological conditions. Spiritual apathy sets in, and even the sight of more Bible study and prayer becomes repulsive.

Just as the body needs to exercise frequently, our spiritual lives must exercise what we have learned and experienced through witnessing to our communities. This is not optional. It is the key to maintaining the taste for Bible study and prayer while becoming more spiritually healthy. For some who are fit, the fitness/witness prescribed should be hard-hitting and heavy. But for novices, the fitness/witness should be gentle. Some are called to preach to millions and call people to baptism. Others are called to meet one-on-one and offer answers to their questions about life. Whatever the form may be, we are called to exercise strength in the form of some service. “Strength to resist evil is best gained by aggressive service” (The Acts of the Apostles, 105).

Extroverted and introverted disciples alike are called to witness for Jesus. Witnessing is not a talent but a spiritual necessity. Regardless of our backgrounds, discipleship entails all three principles of Bible study, prayer, and witnessing. Rearranged and practically implemented through the week, these three principles can be reformulated as the Eight Discipleship “Power Habits”:

1. Daily personal prayer (prayer)
2. Daily personal Bible reading (Bible study)
3. Morning and evening family worship (prayer and Bible study)
4. Weekly Sabbath School attendance (prayer, Bible study, and witnessing)
5. Weekly church attendance (prayer and Bible study)
6. Prayer meeting or group Bible study (prayer and Bible study)
7. Regular personal witnessing (witnessing)
8. Regular involvement in church ministries (witnessing)
LET THE WORD OF GOD BE PREACHED

“In the commission to His disciples, Christ not only outlined their work, but gave them their message. . . . The disciples were to teach what Christ had taught. That which He had spoken, not only in person, but through all the prophets and teachers of the Old Testament, is here included. Human teaching is shut out. There is no place for tradition, for man’s theories and conclusions, or for church legislation. No laws ordained by ecclesiastical authority are included in the commission. None of these are Christ’s servants to teach. . . . Christ’s name is their watchword, their badge of distinction, their bond of union, the authority for their course of action, and the source of their success. Nothing that does not bear His superscription is to be recognized in His kingdom.

“The gospel is to be presented, not as a lifeless theory, but as a living force to change the life. God desires that the receivers of His grace shall be witnesses to its power. Those whose course has been most offensive to Him He freely accepts; when they repent, He imparts to them His divine Spirit, places them in the highest positions of trust, and sends them forth into the camp of the disloyal to proclaim His boundless mercy. He would have His servants bear testimony to the fact that through His grace men may possess Christlikeness of character, and may rejoice in the assurance of His great love. . . .

“In Christ is the tenderness of the shepherd, the affection of the parent, and the matchless grace of the compassionate Saviour. His blessings He presents in the most alluring terms. He is not content merely to announce these blessings; He presents them in the most attractive way, to excite a desire to possess them. So His servants are to present the riches of the glory of the unspeakable Gift. The wonderful love of Christ will melt and subdue hearts, when the mere reiteration of doctrines would accomplish nothing. . . . Words alone cannot tell it. Let it be reflected in the character and manifested in the life. Christ is sitting for His portrait in every disciple. Every one God has predestinated to be ‘conformed to the image of His Son.’ Rom. 8:29. In every one Christ’s long-suffering love, His holiness, meekness, mercy, and truth are to be manifested to the world.

“The first disciples went forth preaching the word. They revealed Christ in their lives. And the Lord worked with them, ‘confirming the word with signs following.’ Mark 16:20. These disciples prepared themselves for their work. Before the day of Pentecost they met together, and put away all differences. They were of one accord. They believed Christ’s promise that the blessing would be given, and they prayed in faith. They did not ask for a blessing for themselves merely; they were weighted with the burden for the salvation of souls. The gospel was to be carried to the uttermost parts of the earth, and they claimed the endowment of power that Christ had promised. Then it was that the Holy Spirit was poured out, and thousands were converted in a day. “So it may be now. Instead of man’s speculations, let the word of God be preached. Let Christians put away their dissensions, and give themselves to God for the saving of the lost. Let them in faith ask for the blessing, and it will come. The outpouring of the Spirit in apostolic days was the ‘former rain,’ and glorious was the result. But the ‘latter rain’ will be more abundant. Joel 2:23.”

*(The Desire of Ages, p.826, 827)*
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

Why is an attitude of service not seen more in the church and in society?

How have you seen the Holy Spirit move spatially, socially, and opportunistically?

How can Jesus more powerfully be the focus of our Bible studies?

In what ways can you co-labor and be yoked with Christ?

How often do you exercise physically? How often do you exercise spiritually?

Why is it difficult to make the kingdom of God our first priority?

What takes up your time? What affects your relationships with your friends, family, and community? Why are you working toward the goals you have currently chosen? Where is Jesus in any of these questions?