

A Time of Prayer: Listen

October 2024 Edition

LISTENING FOR DIVINE SPARKS: A BIBLE STUDY GUIDE FOR OCTOBER 2024

To facilitate group meetings in person or on Zoom, this month's Bible study is also offered as [PowerPoint slides](#) that can be downloaded and modified.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy Spirit we celebrate your life in us. Increase our awareness of this power for your service. Open our eyes and ears to the needs of those you put before us, and use us as your hands and feet. Give us courage to open conversations with those we meet, regardless of their appearance, belief, and status; give us your words to say. Grant us discernment to understand the yearnings of hearts and wisdom to know how to help those who seek to understand your Gospel. Help us to be light to your world. Keep us open to the adventure of life where we meet you day by day. Remind us of the need to be open to how you are moving in our midst and in the lives of those both in the mainstream and on the margins. Guide us by your Spirit to those you have already prepared to receive the Good News of your Kingdom, **Amen.**

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

Acts 8:26-31,34-38 “Philip and the Ethiopian”

<i>New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised (NRSVA)</i>	<i>The Message (MSG)</i>
<p>26 Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Get up and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ (This is a wilderness road.) 27 So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over to this chariot and join it.’ 30 So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ 31 He replied, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.</p> <p>34 The eunuch asked Philip, ‘About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’ 35 Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. 36 As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?’ 38 He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.</p>	<p>Later God’s angel spoke to Philip: “At noon today I want you to walk over to that desolate road that goes from Jerusalem down to Gaza.” He got up and went. He met an Ethiopian eunuch coming down the road. The eunuch had been on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and was returning to Ethiopia, where he was minister in charge of all the finances of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He was riding in a chariot and reading the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit told Philip, “Climb into the chariot.” Running up alongside, Philip heard the eunuch reading Isaiah and asked, “Do you understand what you’re reading?” He answered, “How can I without some help?” and invited Philip into the chariot with him.</p> <p>The eunuch said, “Tell me, who is the prophet talking about: himself or some other?” Philip grabbed his chance. Using this passage as his text, he preached Jesus to him. As they continued down the road, they came to a stream of water. The eunuch said, “Here’s water. Why can’t I be baptized?” He ordered the chariot to stop. They both went down to the water, and Philip baptized him on the spot. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of God suddenly took Philip off, and that was the last the eunuch saw of him. But he didn’t mind. He had what he’d come for and went on down the road as happy as he could be.</p>

LECTIO DIVINA

Ask someone to read the NRSVA translation of the passage aloud.

Allow for several minutes of silence as each bible study participant contemplates the passage. As the passage is read a first time, notice which word(s), sentence(s), or image(s) catch their attention. The group can decide how long the period of silence should last, but in the *Lectio Divina* tradition, it is substantial (a minimum of 3-5 minutes is suggested, perhaps working up to a longer interlude).

Invite participants to briefly share with one another those word(s), sentence(s), or image(s) stirring them. Encourage participants to avoid interpreting or expanding on them at this time, but simply to state them out loud. Explain that time for reflection and discussion will follow later in the prayer time.

Have another person read the MSG translation of the passage aloud, followed by a second period of silence and invite participants to share again. This time, ask participants to notice which word(s), sentence(s), or image(s) catch your attention, but also consider what idea(s), feeling(s) or reflections may emerge.

Have a third person re-read the NRSVA version aloud again, followed by a final period of silence and invite participants to reflect on what they think is being drawn to their attention by the Holy Spirit. There are no right or wrong answers. Consider the following questions:

- *How should we rely on the Holy Spirit for opportunities and words as we meet individuals to speak the good news about Jesus?*
- *How can we go about sharing the good news of the Gospel with those we feel are different from us?*
- *Where is the Holy Spirit inviting us, our congregation and our diocesan church to go farther afield, whether geographically or to the “other” in our own city or neighborhood? What might be our next steps?*

CLOSING PRAYERS

O Holy God, you breathe your life-giving Spirit into this parish and diocese and call us to join together in mission for the spreading of the Gospel: show us the people to whom we should go and the path we should travel; help us to understand the deep longings of their hearts, and enable us to feed them through the living presence of Jesus Christ our Saviour, in whose power we set forth and in whose Name we pray. Amen.¹

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

CAPTURING THE DIVINE SPARKS KINDLED

- Consider the four steps helpful in identifying and capturing any divine sparks that have come up:
 1. Listening
 2. Capturing
 3. Sharing
 4. Acting
- Consider whether there were sparks kindled during this prayer session. Ask a participant to write down any important ideas that emerged and ensure that there is group consensus around what is captured.
- Who do these sparks need to be shared with at this time? Find a way to share the insights gained with those who need to hear them.

ADDITIONAL BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES

- Margaret Aymer, D. Thomason Professor of New Testament at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, invites us into the story of Philip and the Ethiopian while asking ourselves: “Whom are we reluctant to join because of their complicated story? [and] Where might the Spirit be sending us?”
<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/ethiopian-eunuch-baptized/commentary-on-acts-826-39-3>

¹ Prayers from “Litany for the Mission of the Church” (Episcopal Church’s *The Book of Occasional Services*, 2018.)