

"GUIDELINES FOR A WINNING WITNESS"

(Acts 8:25-40)

(Chuck Swindoll)

Philip's example offers several guidelines for how to avoid becoming an obnoxious witness, an ineffective witness, or an apathetic witness (the bounty hunter, the egghead, and the secret agent mentioned in a previous resource). I find five helpful guidelines in the deacon's divinely appointed encounter with a stranger.

Guideline # 1: Be sensitive.

Put yourself in Philip's sandals. Here he is in the midst of a super exciting ministry in Samaria, enjoying incredible success. Lives are being changed, families brought together, illnesses healed, and entire villages turning to follow Jesus Christ. Suddenly, the Lord says, "Leave all of that and go to a lonely road in the middle of nowhere." Philip didn't argue or resist. He obeyed.

An effective witness maintains a sensitive heart, ready and willing to follow the Lord's prompting. Effective witnesses don't just suddenly arrive on the scene; they're led by the Holy Spirit, the same Lord who brings that other person alongside and creates an opportunity leading to an encounter.

Guideline # 2: Be available.

Sensitivity has a twin named Availability. They always go together. You can't have one without the other. If you're sensitive to the leading of the Spirit, then you're available for obeying His prompting. Philip didn't question the Lord's decision to move him from large populations and great activity to a remote road; he simply obeyed. He recognized that kingdom building is God's enterprise; he was merely a laborer. Whether he worked in Samaria, Gaza, Azotus, or Caesarea, it didn't matter. He was available.

Guideline # 3: Be proactive.

It takes initiative to break the silence barrier. We don't want to be obnoxious, but we can't always lie back and wait for people to ask us for help. They don't know what they don't know! Most are confused by the whole subject of religion and, therefore, tentative about beginning a conversation. So, connect on a personal level, looking for opportunities to address a need they might have. Answer questions or clear up misunderstandings while remaining transparent about your beliefs.



Philip saw an opportunity in the man's reading material. He asked a simple, unobtrusive, nonthreatening question: "Do you understand what you are reading?" (8:30).

Guideline # 4: Be tactful.

D. James Kennedy illustrates the quality of tact this way:

I once heard a man walk up to a woman and say, "How are your kidneys today?" That's the truth! I actually heard the man ask that question. Her response? Did she hit him with her purse? No, she said the following: "Oh, they're much better today, thank you, Doctor." I overheard those words in a hospital room. The doctor had earned the right to ask that personal question. If you doubt that, stop the next [woman] you meet on the street and ask it yourself, and see what happens.

All of which is to say, we need to earn the right to ask personal questions. We can do this by becoming a friend, by getting to know the people, by listening to what they have to say, by showing interest, by hearing them when they talk.¹

Don't blame the lost person for being offended if you're offensive. That individual has every reason in the world to be offended. Earning the right to ask personal questions—and spiritual questions are among the most personal and sensitive of all—is the definition of tact.

Guideline # 5: Be precise.

Beginning at that Scripture, Philip "preached Jesus to him" (8:35). Isn't that great? He didn't talk about comparative religion or evidence for intelligent design. He didn't discuss theological issues or social ills. There's a time and place for those discussions, but they are tangential to what is primary: Jesus Christ and how we are to respond to Him. While we must be tactful and address questions or objections, we must not talk around the central issue.

¹ D. James Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion*, 4th edition. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1996), 56.