

## Get Close and Listen Small Group Guide

**Warm-up Question:** (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. What is one interesting thing about you that the others in the group are probably not aware of?
2. What is one topic you really enjoy talking about?

**Read the following passage:** Acts 8:1-8.

Acts 8 is a brief account of one of the most crucial individuals at one of the most crucial moments in the history of the church. Jesus told his small group of disciples that they were to be witnesses “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). For the first seven chapters of Acts, all the action has been in Jerusalem. In chapter 8, things begins to shift. After losing his friend, his home, and his community, Philip crosses cultural boundaries to bring the Gospel to a city in Samaria. This was a major turning point in the progress of the church. It is easy for us to forget that this significant step of progress was precipitated by great pain.

The church crossed another major boundary when God called Philip to a desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza. On this desert caravan route Philip encountered an important Ethiopian official who was seeking God. The Holy Spirit’s instructions to “Go to that chariot and stay near it” are a powerful admonition to us as well. If we want to build a multiethnic church, we need to follow Philip’s example of getting close to people of other ethnicities. We often won’t know what to do until we get close and listen to the people with whom God wants us to connect. This Ethiopian official became the first Gentile convert in the history of the church.

### Questions for Discussion:

1. Have you or those close to you had any experiences that might make you hesitant to fully embrace a multiethnic local church family? Explain. What should we do when people in the church cause us pain?
2. How did the painful events in Acts 7 precipitate progress in Acts 8? Can you think of any times when God used a painful experience in your life to bring about something beneficial? Explain.
3. Jews and Samaritans had a long and tense history marked by suspicion and distrust. They generally tried to avoid contact with each other. Why does separation often lead to greater suspicion? How do you see this phenomenon impacting the relationships between white Christians, black Christians, and Christians that don’t fit into either of these categories?
4. Do you have close friends from other ethnicities with whom you are vulnerable? Explain.

5. Read James 1:19-20. Why is listening so important? Why might it be particularly important for those in majority populations?
6. How might lamenting together the pains of the past and present help us take steps toward unity and reconciliation? What are some pains that we should lament? (If you have trouble thinking of some, consider this famous passage from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail.")

*But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick, brutalize, and even kill your black brothers and sisters with impunity; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she cannot go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her little eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see the depressing clouds of inferiority begin to form in her little mental sky, and see her begin to distort her little personality by unconsciously developing a bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son asking in agonizing pathos, "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross-country drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger" and your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and when your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never knowing what to expect next, and plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodyness"—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.*

7. Philip and the Ethiopian official discuss a passage from Isaiah 53 which is a powerful anticipation of Jesus' atoning death on the cross. How is the cross vital for true reconciliation?

**Pray**