

## **“Most Encouraging” Passage**

Bro. Kevin Bray kept me up most of the night Wednesday. His *assignment* in bible class for this week really got me thinking. Though an “Encore Presentation” of a baseball game was playing, my mind couldn’t seem to quit thinking about various possibilities of “What passage *encourages* you personally the most.” I’d never thought about that previously! Favorite passage? Sure, many of them (usually several per book). Favorite bible character? Again, several in the Old and New Testaments. Most challenging passage to understand? Yep, again many. Most intriguing verse? Several candidates. But the most *encouraging* verse? I had never been asked, and had never thought of such on my own either!

My mind seemed to keep endlessly scanning until I finally got up off the couch (and away from the baseball game) and went to my desk to seek and settle on an answer. Although I not sure the one I selected will remain my “most encouraging passage” forever, and there is the added caveat that “Preachers” are usually just different critters than most folks! But what I settled on was **Acts 8:40**. And “no,” I’m not just trying to differ or difficult! And “ye,” I recognize that probably not a single other person in the congregation would pick this verse as their “most encouraging” passage. But (again, preachers are different critters!), this verse *encourages* me as a “preacher”... which is a good thing since I’ve been one for 35+ years. Not because a guy named “*Philip*” is an *evangelist* (and certainly a formidable contender for “favorite NT character”!), but because by definition “*encouragement*” (the Greek word *paraklesis* {par-ak-lay-sis}) means to *draw near* or *close* for *admonition* and *exhortation* as well as *comfort* and *courage*.

**So, as a preacher, Acts 8:40 encourages me in my work because:**

- 1. It teaches me to *trust God*.** Philip had a “very successful work” in Samaria, cf. 8:6-8,12-13,14-19. After Peter and John “*started back to Jerusalem*” (v.25), he surely must have thought that he would remain there to continue to *water* and *tend* what he had *planted* (and *benefit* thereof). But God said, “*Arise and go south to the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza*” (which is a *desert* and often *deserted* road). There is no evidence of argument, complaint, questioning, or hesitation from Philip. Why not? Because he *trusted* God, so “*he arose and went,*” v.27. So, what did he do when he “*found himself at Azotus*” after the Ethiopian’s conversion? The same thing: *trusted God* who put Him there and “*kept preaching the gospel,*” v.40. Wherever you *find yourself*, **trust God** and **do what you’re supposed to do!**
- 2. It reminds me that *the power to save is in the gospel, not me*.** The *preacher* was/is often *part of the process* (cf. Rom.10:14), but *the gospel* is “*the power of God for salvation,*” Rom.1:16. It encourages me in that it relieves the *burden* and allows me to just “*preach the word*” and “*be ready in season and out of season*” to “*reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction*” as Paul instructed Timothy, 2Tim.4:2. God, through His *powerful* word, does the *heavy lifting* of salvation, cf. 1Cor.3:5-7; 2:1-5. **If I am faithful** (cf. 2Tim.2:15-21) to “*cleanse myself,*” **God will put me “into service” (1Tim.1:12)**. There is not only *room* in the kingdom of God; there is also a *place His service*.

**3. It teaches me the *value of each and every soul*.** The eunuch “*went on his way rejoicing*” (presumably back to Ethiopia with the saving power of the gospel in tow), but God didn’t send Philip with him to that *fertile field* which was surely “*white for harvest*,” cf. John 4:35. The eunuch or others would have to *plow, sow, and harvest* there. Instead, there were souls that needed the opportunity to *hear and believe* in Azotus (ancient *Ashdod* of the Philistines) and up the coast to Caesarea (Maritima *on the coast*, not Caesarea Philippi, cp. Matt.16:13). We find him still (apparently laboring) in Caesarea some twenty years later, cf. Acts 21:8. Philip didn’t waste time *celebrating and reliving* the eunuch’s conversion, he kept right preaching because he understood the *value of each and every soul*, Matt.16:26.

These are lessons *I need in my work*. Obviously, asking a bunch of Christians “What is your most encouraging passage?” is like asking a fisherman “What is your favorite fishing lure?” You’re going to get a lot of different answers, and each one has their own particular reasons for preferring that one.

**Conclusions/Application:** But regardless of which passage you select for Wednesday’s class (and I hope you also spend some time really thinking about which one and why) take some things home with you this morning:

- *Encouragement* is not just about *comfort, consolation, and courage*; it also includes **admonition** and **exhortation**. We need those just as much as the others.
- We have and serve “*the God of all comfort*,” 2Cor.1:3. The *Scriptures* are and should be a great source for *encouragement*, Rom.15:4.
- He *comforts* and *encourages* us in order that we, in turn, may *comfort/encourage* others, 2Cor.1:4. *Encouragement* is supposed to be *reciprocal* and “*in the faith*,” Rom.1:12; Col.2:2.