

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

Sharing the Gospel with Those Who Differ from Us
Acts 8:4-8, 26-38

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the "Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study". That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this coming session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Bible Study Leader:

Bring a Bible atlas and a Bible dictionary to your session. These are available from many university or public libraries. If your home church has some available funds, a set

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Sharing the Gospel with Those Who Differ from Us – 03-08-05-en

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of large-scale Bible maps can serve you as an excellent teaching aid. You don't need a tripod. Simply lay them on the floor when needed. This might be a good opportunity to ask your church to purchase a set.

For children, find (if possible) and bring a large picture of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

Worship Time Leader:

Music Sources:

"Lead Me to Some Soul Today", Various sources, CCLI #63211.

"Jesus Loves the Little Children", Various sources, Public domain, CCLI #58415.

"Send Me, O Lord, Send Me", (BH, 1991, #582), CCLI #246942.

Locate and use other familiar choruses and hymns that call us to be active witnesses for Christ.

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)***Sharing the Gospel with Those Who Differ from Us*****Focal Text**

Acts 8:4-8, 26-38

Background Text

Acts 8: 1-8, 26-40

Main Idea

Philip shared the gospel with the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch, who his culture considered unacceptable.

Question to Explore

How willing are we to share the gospel with people whom our culture considers “different,” or unacceptable?

Teaching Aim

To lead participants to describe barriers they and their church need to cross to share the gospel with people their culture considers “different,” or unacceptable.

Gathering Together:

Choose a chorus or hymn that speaks of the need to tell others about Christ. (Note: The chorus, “Lead Me to Some Soul Today,” will be sung at the end of the Worship Time.

First thoughts:

A new church, in Calgary, Alberta, reflects the cultural mosaic of Canada. Although first impressions would indicate that this is a church of Anglo Canadians, a closer look reveals a beautiful panorama of those whom God has brought together. There is Eva and her husband, Swaby, from Jamaica, and Charlotte with her children—Peter, Mark David, and Shelby from Zimbabwe. Catherine and Vincent along with their beautiful children are from Nigeria, and Catherine often serves coffee on Sunday mornings, dressed in her lovely Nigerian clothes. Shane from Korea enjoys singing with the choir.

Barbara, Gillian, and John all immigrated from Britain. Ruth stills speaks with a soft U.S. Oklahoman drawl after a lifetime of living in Canada. Other “down south” accents are heard. Julian, from Indonesia, came to the Lord while renting a room from Imelda, who is from the Philippines. John and Pansy are Chinese Canadians and are young adult leaders who reflect their strong Christian heritage. Aaron and Sally are newer Chinese Canadians. Russell was recently baptized and although some of his Chinese Canadian family are Christian he once studied to be a Buddhist monk. Douglas and Constanza from Colombia were baptized last January after the young adults ministered to them in the grief they experienced following a miscarriage. Leo and his family arrived last year from northwestern China. Leo comes often to church hoping to improve his English skills. Names like Jakobsen, Heerema, McKay, McDonald, Melliphant, Metz, Maekelburger, Mesluk, Savi, Greyeyes and Constantinitus speak of the varied heritage represented by these believers. And yet beyond the Canadian multiculturalism is a greater bond; it is the bond experienced by those believers in Christ—in the Son of God.

Our study and worship today will reflect the passion with which one early believer, Philip, shared his faith and will call us to be willing to share with others—those like us and those who may differ.

Closing the Gathering Time:

Sing the familiar children’s song “Jesus Loves the Little Children.”

A clear statement of what the group will be studying this session and/or an encouragement to the group to seriously consider it.

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won’t need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

Sharing the Gospel with Those Who Differ from Us

Focal Text

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Introduction to Your Personal Study:

Ajet (pronounced I-yet) was a sweet, toothless old man from Kosovo. Gerry is my pastor. Two people could hardly be more different. Ajet, a Muslim who relocated to our city in Canada because of the war in Yugoslavia, spoke scarcely any English. He spent lonely days longing for his homeland and his traditions. Many in our church wondered how we could possibly be a witness to this odd little man who went about with his head wrapped in a scarf. We had so little in common. He was just so different from us. Pastor Gerry found a way to befriend him. Every week as he visited with the refugee family he would offer to pray for them and with them. They respected his relationship with God. Often Gerry would kneel and pray to Jesus on behalf of this precious family, while Ajet would kneel on his ritual prayer rug and pray to Allah. After Gerry won their

confidence, he began to invite Ajet to accompany him as he made visitation rounds at the local hospital each Wednesday. Unable to understand a word of what was being said, Ajet would smile his toothless grin and bow respectfully to each patient. He understood that Gerry was a minister of God, sharing God's good news. At the end of each visit, Ajet would pass the patient one of the tracts or scripture portions that Gerry had invited him to carry. He was pleased to have purposeful work to do. It was important to him to be able to help his friend Gerry. With every opportunity that presented itself, Gerry would share with Ajet that God loved him personally. We will never know just how much this sweet old man understood.

Twenty-two months was all the time God gave us with Ajet. When a heart condition became serious, he resolved to go home to Kosovo to die. Shortly before his death, Ajet called from Kosovo with the help of an interpreter. Weeping he asked his friend, Pastor Gerry, to pray for him. Who knows what God helped Ajet to understand. Certainly he understood that a Christian man in Canada cared enough for him to share his life and the love of God Almighty, with him.

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study**”, found at the beginning of this Unit. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you, as well.

This eighth chapter of Acts gives us a glimpse into the life of a layman who was willing to show the way of salvation to whomever God brought across his path. Philip did not regard his position as deacon in the early church to be restrictive; rather, he expanded his role, taking evangelistic and preaching assignments to a variety of audiences. First we see him ministering with great success among the hated Samaritans. Then he is whisked away from that arena to a lonely place in the desert to minister to an Ethiopian returning from a worship experience in Jerusalem. Both situations involved people the Jews had trouble accepting. We will see that God has given each of us a similar assignment—to show the way of salvation to every person, regardless of how different they might seem to us.

Focusing on the Meaning:

Scattered (Acts 8: 4-8, 26-40)

8:4 The first four verses of this chapter tell us that after the violent death of Stephen at the hands of Jewish zealots in Jerusalem, there was increased persecution against Christians. Many believers (excluding the apostles) were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Wherever these believers travelled, the Word of God was spread and many were brought to faith in Christ. Philip was one of those who had left Jerusalem. This particular Philip is not one of the apostles. We read back in Acts 6: 1-6 that Philip was one of the seven men chosen to serve alongside the apostles as helpers (deacons) in practical types of service in the Jerusalem church. Philip was known as a wise, spirit-

filled person who was willing to wait on tables and take care of administrative duties in order to ease the burden on the apostles.

Barriers and Blessings (8:5-8)

8:5-7 Apparently, Philip was also willing to preach the gospel in whatever situation he found himself, and to stretch his spiritual gifts. In this instance, Philip travelled to Samaria, a region north of Jerusalem, but lower in elevation. Luke, the author of Acts, does not make any mention of the animosity that existed between the Samaritans and the Jews, historically. There was rivalry about the Samaritans' mixed racial heritage (only part Jewish), and differences concerning worship practices. Philip went ahead and preached the good news of Christ to the great crowds that gathered. As he preached, miracles of healing and exorcism were demonstrated among many people. People were saved—not because of the miracles they saw, but because they believed the Word.

8:8 Wherever the Word of God is proclaimed, lives are changed and there is great joy. The people of this city who heard and believed were restored to physical health, delivered from demon possession, and delivered from their sinful lifestyle. There was cause for great joy.

A New Venue—A New Barrier (8:26-29)

8:26 Amazingly, an angel uprooted Philip in the midst of the great revival he was preaching and led him to a solitary place in the desert. Although Philip was enjoying tremendous success with the crowds in Samaria, he immediately followed the leadership of the angel to the quiet setting along the desert road. Philip had no idea where he might be going but he was willing to obey the Spirit's prompting. There are times when we feel that our gifts and talents might best be used in a certain ministry of the church, but God may have other plans. He may desire to stretch our abilities and use us in ways we had not previously served. God is able to work through a person who is willing to try whatever God is calling them to do.

8:27 Here we are introduced to an interesting individual whom many would consider "different." He is never named in the scripture; we know him only as the Ethiopian eunuch. In those days it was not uncommon for eunuchs (castrated males) to serve in the women's quarters of royal households. This particular eunuch had great responsibility and authority. He was in charge of the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This was not present-day Ethiopia, but an ancient kingdom of Nubia, a large area from Aswan in southern Egypt to Khartoum, Sudan. The eunuch had been to Jerusalem to worship. We know that he was not a full-fledged convert to Judaism (Deuteronomy 23:1 tells us that eunuchs were forbidden to enter the Lord's assembly.), but he was obviously a God-fearer who was anxious to learn more of the God of the Jews.

8:28 He had been to Jerusalem and now was returning home in his chariot. The fact that he had such freedom to travel abroad tells us that the queen valued him very much. Because of his prestigious position in Ethiopia, we know that this man would not have been driving the chariot himself or travelling on his own; no doubt he had a fair-sized contingent at his service to escort him home. The eunuch was sitting back, possibly under an umbrella to keep the hot sun off him, reading a portion of Scripture from the prophet Isaiah. The custom of that day was to read aloud, so others around him were also aware of the nature of the passage.

8:29 This time it was not an angel who communicated with Philip, but the Spirit who urged him to make contact with the eunuch. The Spirit not only gives us power to serve and speak for Christ, He also guides us to the exact place where we can be used and to the exact person He has prepared.

Stepping up for Service (8:30-37)

8:30,31 Philip obediently stepped up to the vehicle, heard the passage being read, and inquired as to whether the man understood what he was reading. Because the eunuch did not have any depth of understanding, he invited the stranger to join him in the chariot and to provide some insight into the Scripture. How refreshing to see this teachable attitude. The Spirit had been at work in this man's heart, readying him to hear the explanation that Philip was prepared to share.

8:32-35 The eunuch had been reading a passage from Isaiah 53:7-8, the prophecy of God's suffering servant. It speaks of the Lord as a willing sacrifice for sinners, even willing to give up his own rights. The Ethiopian was confused as to whom the scripture was referring: Was it to Isaiah, or to someone else? Philip seized the opportunity that God had provided to share the whole gospel story with this willing listener. This Ethiopian was different than Philip in many ways—race, social status, physical mutilation, economics, and religion. They were total strangers but Philip recognized that God had prepared the heart of this man and he willingly crossed every barrier to share with him the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. The eunuch had been excluded from the temple because of his background and his physical mutilation. But now he was welcomed into the kingdom of God through faith in Christ. There would be no such barriers in this new faith; every person would be able to share equally in God's grace.

8:36 Obviously the eunuch heard the Word that Philip shared and believed in Jesus for salvation from his sins. As soon as he found salvation he desired to be baptized. The King James Version says, "What doth hinder me to be baptized?" In other words, is there anything that prevents me from following through with baptism in obedience to scripture? Is there any barrier that keeps me from taking part in baptism? Perhaps he had seen the baptism of converts in Jerusalem, or perhaps Philip had included that in his witness. At any rate, he wasted no time in requesting that Philip baptize him as soon as they came upon some water. He wanted everyone in his entourage to know that a significant change had happened in his life.

8:37 Only later manuscripts of the New Testament include verse 37, in which the eunuch confessed, before Philip baptized him, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Even though the earliest manuscripts do not contain this verse, it is clear that throughout the Book of Acts only those who confessed Christ as the Son of God were baptized (NIV page 1377 footnotes).

No More Barriers (8:38, 39)

8:38 The chariot and the whole company travelling with it were stopped in order for Philip to baptize the eunuch. They both went down into the water, indicating that the method of baptism was likely immersion. Certainly the attitude of the heart is more important than the mode of baptism, but the scriptures indicate that immersion reflects the life and death of Christ.

8:39 Incredibly, as soon as the two men emerged from the water, the Spirit of the Lord whisked Philip away from that place. He was no longer needed there. His work was finished. He had been obedient to the Spirit in sharing the good news with the Ethiopian eunuch, with whom he had so little in common. The result was that the eunuch was saved, baptized, and went on his way rejoicing in his newfound relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:

In this chapter we see Philip, an evangelist, participate in two successful conversion stories. The first is with the crowds of hated Samaritans, and the second with an individual en route to Ethiopia through the desert. Both stories involve overcoming barriers of belief, race, and status. In both incidents Philip was obedient to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit to share Christ with outsiders. Your goal consists of leading the church to do the same: follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit to share Christ with outsiders.

For Personal Reflection:

- 1. What have I learned from this study?**
- 2. What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?**
- 3. What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?**

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

Sharing the Gospel with Those Who Differ from Us

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc. Children who stay with their parents in the Youth/Adult study should have the material on worship as suggested in **The Children's Corner** at the beginning of this **Unit** of studies. (Ask your leader who downloads the studies for those suggestions).

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Focal Text

Acts 8:4-8, 26-38

Background Text

Acts 8: 1-8, 26-40

Main Idea

Philip shared the gospel with the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch, all of whom his culture considered unacceptable.

Question to Explore

How willing are we to share the gospel with people whom our culture considers “different,” or unacceptable?

Teaching Aim

To lead participants to describe barriers they and their church need to cross to share the gospel with people their culture considers “different,” or unacceptable.

Connect with Life:

Using a Bible atlas or a separate map of Biblical Palestine, encourage group members to discover Samaria, the area between Jerusalem and Gaza, ancient Nubia, and Caesarea—the locations that we will be learning about in our study of this passage.

Guide the Study:

Have someone read Acts 8:1–8. Find out what the group already knows about Philip and his role in the early church.

Ask someone in the group to look up the word *Samaritan* in a Bible dictionary. Discuss some of the reasons there was animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans.

Discuss modern-day countries in which various cultures and/or religions live in similar tension. Could it happen in the country where you live?

Ask: “What evidence can you find in verse 8 to prove that Philip’s message was taken seriously by the Samaritans?”

Have another member read Acts 8: 26–38. Brainstorm reasons why God took Philip from the important work he was involved with in Samaria.

Ask the group to form a mental picture of the Ethiopian. Ask: “What do you see? How do you know that the eunuch was not travelling alone? What do you think Philip saw when he looked at the eunuch?”

List some of the barriers that might have separated them. If children are present in the Bible teaching time, try to find a picture of how Philip and the eunuch might have looked.

Poll the group to see if they are aware of any person who is religious, reads the Bible, may even attend church, but is—like the Ethiopian—unsaved.

Ask: “What steps might be taken in order to overcome this barrier of “being religious” to reach that person with the gospel message?”

Discuss the eunuch’s response to Philip’s teaching from the scripture.

Ask group members to recall a time when God gave an opportunity to witness to someone different from himself/herself.

Ask: “What barriers had to be crossed?”

Ask: “Are there other barriers that seem uncrossable?”

Say: “For many of us the barrier may be that of language. Are we willing to make the effort to learn to communicate with a person who speaks another language? This may involve helping them learn English if they have moved from another country to North America.”

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to go away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Encourage members to search within themselves to answer these questions:

- “With whom am I uncomfortable talking?”
- “Am I genuinely willing to let God use me in sharing a word about Christ with that person?”

Lead in a prayer of commitment to overcoming these specific barriers in order to be better witnesses of God’s love where we are.

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

Sharing the Gospel with Those Who Differ from Us

Acts 8:4-8; 25-38

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

Who is Included and Who is Excluded?

Think of your school. List some of the students who have recently come from another country. Have you had the opportunity to get to know some of them? Is language a problem? Many city schools have a wide variety of cultures represented. In your school, do these cultures intermingle and enrich one another, or is there a tendency for groups to form that exclude others.

Think of one thing you could do this week to cross a barrier that may exist between you and a fellow student.

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***Sharing the Gospel with Those Who Differ from Us*****Beginning the Service:**

Sing "We Are Called to Be God's people" # 390, BH

Offering:

Ask an older child to pray, thanking God for the offering.

Praying for the World:

The large majority of the 1.2 million Tukulor live in the Senegal River Basin that separates the West African nations of Senegal and Mauritania, and extends into Western Mali. The Tukulor are farmers who grow millet, corn, wheat, groundnuts and vegetables. In the 11th century, the Tukulor were the first sub-Saharan Africans to convert to Islam. They proceeded to initiate a series of jihads that resulted in the forced conversion of many other ethnic groups. There has been a Christian witness among the Tukulor for more than a quarter century. However, today there are less than fifty believers. Ask God to open the spiritual eyes of the Tukulor to see the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Pray for a spiritual awakening among them through which they will become effective evangelists. Pray for the Gospel to spread throughout West Africa, through their changed lives and vibrant witness.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to help the person who directs the worship time to bring the theme and Scriptures for the day to a conclusion. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he/she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader may choose other ways to share the meaning of the worship experience.

Sharing the Gospel with those who differ from us
Isaiah 53:7-8

Introduction:

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Most of us could not remember the text of the Bible study or sermon we heard only a week ago; yet across the span of time from Philip's conversation with the Ethiopian eunuch, until today, the record of what was read on that desert road endures. What was it that Philip read and explained that proved so miraculous? What words could be heard that would change the whole course of the life of this experienced government official—that would change his whole belief system?

Quoting from Isaiah 53:7-8 in Acts 8, in *The Message*, we read:

***As a sheep led to slaughter,
and quiet as a lamb being sheared,
He was silent, saying nothing.
He was mocked and put down, never got a fair trial.
But who now can count his kin
since he's been taken from the earth?***

The eunuch asked an obvious question: "Who is this talking about?" Is Isaiah, the prophet, talking about himself or somebody else? Philip must have explained that Isaiah was pointing ahead to a Messiah and that Messiah had been born and had died for the sins of the world. What kind of Saviour was He?

1. Jesus did not defend Himself.

Jesus knew that for the eternal plan to be completed, his death was necessary. He was willing to take on Himself the sins of the world.

In our action-oriented world we are not always comfortable with a leader who will not defend himself/herself. In whatever political race that is occurring, there are accusations and rebuttals flying back and forth until the average voter is, at best—wearied, and at worst—too discouraged to vote.

The CEO of any major company is paid a large salary to defend the company interests.

The principal of a school whose student test scores have declined is expected to explain why and what will be done to improve the situation.

The mayor of a town where taxes are increased must defend the reasons for that tax increase—the need for more schools, more hospitals, increased police protection—all good reasons for the higher taxes.

But the Son of Man—the very God of the universe—made no defense; He was quiet, as quiet as a lamb being sheared.

But the eunuch was a man of the world. What would appeal to him about One who would not defend Himself?

2. Jesus was mocked and put down; He never received a fair trial.

The larger passage of Isaiah is more descriptive. No doubt Philip read it with the eunuch.

***For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot,
And like a root out of parched ground;***

***He has no stately form or majesty
That we should look upon Him,
Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him;***

***He was despised and forsaken of men,
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;***

***And like one from whom men hide their face,
He was despised and we did not esteem Him.***

Wait up, Philip! You'll never convince the eunuch to follow Christ with a description like that! But Philip read on:

***Surely, our griefs He Himself bore
And our sorrows He carried;***

***Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God and afflicted.***

But He was pierced through for our iniquities;

***The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him
And by His scourging we are healed.***

Did the eunuch hear the magnificent music of Christmas, taken from Isaiah—*The Messiah*—not yet written by Handel? Actually, much of the Book of Isaiah is written in the style of a symphonic composition.

He certainly heard a message that resonated with him as the magnificent words set to music have resonated through the years to others. The deeply sorrowful words written by the prophet Isaiah must have flooded into his heart. ***“He was pierced through for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon him and by His scourging we are healed.”***

3. The actions of Jesus apply to us, today.

The prophetic words from Isaiah are as deeply important today as when they were first written. Both Philip and the eunuch would want us to remember:

***All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way,
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him.***

As a young child the writer learned those words as requirements in a missionary organization. Even then she understood the vast impact of what was being said. All of us, each of us, people like me, people not like me, people who live close to me, people who live far away from me—all have gone astray. But the Lord had a plan for forgiveness—the Lord caused the sin of us all to fall on Him.

But how will people know? How will we sense that our friend, our classmate, our neighbour is as ready as the Ethiopian eunuch to hear and believe?

Call to Commitment:

Do we really believe that the same Spirit of the Lord that guided Philip will guide us all these centuries later? Can we hear the message of the angel of the Lord saying, “Arise, and go?” In an earlier experience, which led to his prophetic ministry to the people of Israel, Isaiah describes the voice of the Lord saying, ***“Whom shall I send and who will go for Us? Then I said, ‘Here I am, Send Me.’”***

Concluding the Service:

Sing softly and prayerfully together “Lead Me to Some Soul Today”.