

# the **SPIRIT-EMPOWERED** word

by Vicki Sairs

## Philip and the Ethiopian

Lyndon Byler's Friday night presentation for RBC's Christian Education Program in Hartville had a title: "Life through the Word." The subtitle, "The Spirit-Empowered Word," didn't make it into the printed program, but it shaped the content of Lyn's talk. It was all about the Word—the Living Word.

Lyn opened with the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8). "This Ethiopian man was searching," said Lyn. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship and was reading from Isaiah, but "the dots weren't connecting."

The Word was central to the Ethiopian's belief. "We have done a good job with the Word," said Lyn. RMM has led the way with the vision of missions and RBC has led the way with helping us hold high the authority of Scripture and the value of the Word. But "the main question I grapple with in this story is 'What was it that led to the Ethiopian's conversion? What led to life for the Ethiopian?'"

This was a man who had pain in his background—not just physical pain, but the pain of disappointment in life. He probably didn't choose to be a eunuch. He had become successful, but "something in his life experiences had driven him to the point where he was searching."

"Don't you and I have people in our lives who are just like this man—people whose lives are filled with pain, people who are searching for something in their lives?" asked Lyn. What led to change for this man? "The simple answer is the Holy Spirit."

Perhaps, he added, the real question is "Why don't Philip stories happen to me?" Where is the God who changes lives? Where is the power in the Word that changes people's lives when they read it?

## The message of Jesus is central to the Word

The heart of Philip's story is this verse: "Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus" (Acts 8:35).

When we read this story, our mind goes to the work of the Spirit: how the Spirit led Philip to a place, enabled him to run with a chariot, and then took him away. Our minds can be fixated on the power of the Spirit, but "the amazing part of the story is the message of Jesus."

What gets in our way when we try to communicate

that message? Division in the church can certainly do that. "When the message of the cross becomes central to our focus, there is power." This message unifies us, but if division arises, what happens?

How many Ethiopian eunuchs are out there who have never had the Scriptures explained to them? How many "never come to know the power of Jesus in their lives because of disunity over things in the church?"

In I Corinthians 2:4-5, Paul says, "My speech and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and power, so that your faith might not be based on men's wisdom but on God's power."

It's an amazing truth that we can preach and teach the message of Jesus, but it is the Spirit who brings life to that message, said Lyn.

"We are the messenger; the power is through the Spirit." It's so easy to simply share the message of Jesus in our own words and understanding. Paul is really saying, "I don't want a church of people who believe in Jesus because some man convinced them it was the right way to believe. I want a church that has realized God's power in their life."

Lyn held up copies of CMC's statements on theology and practice and stressed his appreciation for them. CMC has "a solid biblical foundation," he said. But "theology in itself does not bring life." Jesus told the Pharisees: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (John 5:39-40).

At the heart of the message of Jesus is "coming to him and asking him to give us life . . . to do something inside." Are we grateful for the work of the Spirit who changes us from the inside?

## The work of the Spirit is central to the message of Jesus

"The message of Jesus is central to the Word, the work of the Spirit is central to the message of Jesus." These elementary truths are not difficult for us to accept.

"Yet what amazes me is that when it comes to the work of the Spirit, we want it to stop right there."

When the Spirit of God comes into our life through our faith in Jesus, that is not the end. It is the beginning of living a life that is led and controlled by the very Spirit of God.



### NEW STUDENT CENTER



RBC President Jon Showalter was delighted to announce that RBC is moving forward to build a new student center. Commenting on the decision, he said: "I'm trusting God to fill in the narrative from here. It should be an exciting ride!"

"Jesus didn't come just to save us from hell; he came to give us life here on this earth."

From the time you confess your faith in Jesus, said Lyn, you are called to live a supernatural life through the Spirit. Yes, we have the Word of God, we know how to live, we don't want to add to the Scripture. "You're right; we don't want to add to the Scripture." But listen to what Paul says:

"The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us" (I Cor. 2:10-12).

The Spirit is central to our life. "We can only understand this Word through the Spirit; it is the Spirit that brings this Word to life."

Lyn cited Paul's warning in the second letter to Timothy about people having "a form of godliness but denying its power," then added, "Church, we are in a dangerous position, and I'm talking to CMC. We have an incredible

knowledge of the Bible, we have a heritage in the Mennonite faith that has taught us how to live as a Christian, and it's a wonderful heritage."

But the danger for us lies in losing sight of God's grace. "I'm so grateful for the teaching that has been reignited on grace," he said. Another danger is not tapping into the power of the Holy Spirit. We think we don't need Him.

That's a very dangerous spot to be. "It seems that among us is a fear of what the Spirit might do among us. We see some of the excesses of the Charismatic church and we say, 'We don't want to look like that.' The Spirit isn't concerned about you looking right; he's concerned about doing a work in your life."

God loves you, said Lyn. He has sent his Spirit to the church. Embrace His work, allow it to come and flow through us. "Lay down your fear."

"Let's open ourselves up to the work of the Spirit. There are many Ethiopian eunuchs who are waiting for us."

Lyn closed by inviting people to come forward for prayer. "If God has spoken to you, I encourage you to come to the front, kneel and pray. God loves us; he wants to do a work in our life. Come and talk to him."



*Lyn Byler, RBC board member, spoke at Friday night's Christian Education Program. He pastors Maranatha Fellowship and owns Byler's Store in Dover, Delaware.*

