PHILIP THE WAITER

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Category: Observations

One of my favourite New Testament characters is Philip who we first meet in Acts 6 where he is mentioned as one of the seven who were chosen to wait on tables so as to sort out a problem between two groups of early believers. Then in Acts 21:8 he is mentioned as Philip the Evangelist.Â I'm really impressed with that career path; from waiter to evangelist. In our world, that seems quite a leap. We are also told that Philip had four daughters all of whom had the gift of prophesy. That could make for lively family get-togethers. It seems a shame that we know so little about this fascinating character.

So what do we know?

Well, Philip was a Hellenic Jew; that is he spoke Greek as his first language and probably hadnâ€™t grown up in Palestine. He was a bit of an outsider. This is something that Luke highlights in Acts. It is very often the outsiders, people from the Greek speaking Jewish diaspora who were responsible for taking the Gospel over cultural boundaries.Â I suspect that the same is true in many churches and mission agencies; the people at the centre can be too busy maintaining things and it is those in the margins who come up with the real innovations.

So what else do we know about Philip?

Acts 6:1-4

> *"In those days when the number of disciples was increasing,Â the Hellenistic JewsÂ among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.Â Â So the Twelve gathered all the disciplesÂ together and said, â€œIt would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of GodÂ in order to wait on tables.Â Â Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the SpiritÂ and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to themÂ Â and will give our attention to prayerÂ and the ministry of the word.â€*

What is fascinating in this account is the qualifications required for the people who were going to be overseeing the feeding of the widows; they were to be known to be full of the SpiritÂ and wisdom.

â€œFull of the Holy Spirit and Wisdomâ€ â€“ waiters!

Iâ€™ve seen adverts for mission agency CEOâ€™s that were less demanding than that. However, it is perhaps the most important factor in choosing people to work in Godâ€™s mission. They need to be tuned in to what God is doing and saying and wise enough to make decisions based on that. Perhaps it's no surprise that he ended up as a respected evangelist, when his starting point was already so high.

To me, Philip's story raises some big questions over how we select people for various aspects of Christian service. We tend to focus on technical skills of one sort or another; these are easily

assessed and measured, but those aren't the things that will ultimately achieve what is needed.