26 Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Get up and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ (This is a wilderness road.)

27 So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over to this chariot and join it.’ 30 So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ 31 He replied, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. 32 Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:
‘Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.

33 In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth.’

34 The eunuch asked Philip, ‘About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’ 35 Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. 36 As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?’ 38 He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip* baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

There is a story told about a toddler who had become very attached to his big sister. There came a time when the sister began going off to school. The toddler started watching out the front window for his sister each day as she would come home on the school bus. As the sister opened the door to her home, her brother would grab and hug her. There came a day, when for some reason the brother was not at the door when she arrived. So, she went
to her room. Shortly thereafter, the brother realizing it was time for his sister to be home, ran to the window to watch for her. The sister saw her brother peering out the window, so she quietly snuck up behind him--and then tapped him on the shoulder. As he turned around and saw his sister, he broke into a big smile and then gave his sister the biggest hug. That tap on the shoulder brightened the day of this toddler. His response--a Big Smile and a Big Hug All the result from a Tap on the Shoulder.

Let us look closely today at the passage from Acts--I want to begin with a passage in Chapter 6, which discusses the selection of seven helpers: It seems that "the number of disciples of Jesus was growing--as a result there arose a quarrel between the Greek-speaking Jews and the native Jews. The Greek-speaking Jews claimed that their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of funds. So the twelve apostles called the whole group of believers together and said:

'It is not right for us to neglect the preaching of God's word in order to handle finances. So, then, friends, choose seven men among you who are known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and we will put them in charge of this matter. We ourselves, then, will give our full time to prayer and the work of preaching.'" Stephen was one of the seven chosen--also one named Philip.

We skip to the last part of Chapter 7. Stephen, known to us, as the first of the Christian martyrs, was stoned to death as a man by the name of Saul held the cloaks of those who administered the stoning. Chapter 8 begins with Saul persecuting followers of Jesus in an effort to destroy the church. It then takes up with the Gospel being preached in Samaria.
As we had stated earlier, Philip had been chosen as one of the seven helpers to care for the widows in Jerusalem but he also went to Samaria to preach the Gospel. It is while Philip is in Samaria that our account begins. Notice in the story that there are what I would call--Shoulder Taps--Shoulder Taps from God--

The first--"An angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Get ready and go south to the road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza.'" That's all--Just go down that road.

And the second--"The Holy Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to that carriage and stay close to it.'" Stay near the carriage. Another simple Shoulder Tap.

It seems that the intent of both the "angel of the Lord" and the Holy Spirit was to guide Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch. Note what the Eunuch had been doing as he made his way home from worshipping God in Jerusalem--He had been reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah. As Philip approached him--Philip asked: "Do you understand what you are reading?" The eunuch did not. He shared the passage which was difficult to understand. He then asked whom the passage was talking about. Philip then told the eunuch the Good News about Jesus. And the result: the eunuch asked to be baptized--and he was. And the story declares: "When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord took Philip away. The official did not see him again, but continued on his way, full of joy." By tradition, this eunuch--a Gentile--was among the "first fruits of the spread of Christianity to the Gentiles. And also, by tradition, this eunuch was to
become an evangelist to his own people in Ethiopia. Here, the results of a Shoulder Tap by God.

Just what can we say a Shoulder Tap is? One has declared that a Shoulder Tap is a "prompting, possibly from God, leading one to act." Said another way--a Shoulder Tap is "when God taps us on the shoulder and uses us at just the right moment." In our passage of scripture, Philip felt the Shoulder Tap of God--he was led to do something which ended up helping to explain the Good News of Jesus to a Gentile--which led to a baptism into the faith--and eventually even more. A simple one-on-one encounter--all because of a Shoulder Tap by God.

Let us look at another encounter--this time--a Shoulder Tap by Jesus (Luke 19:1-10): It concerns a tax collector by the name of Zacchaeus. From what we have learned Zacchaeus was very likely rich. It appears that he was also the chief tax collector in Jericho who had bought the right to collect taxes for the Roman Empire in his city. He would pay a fixed amount of the taxes collected for Rome and then forced the people to pay additional taxes which he would keep for himself. Thus, he was hated by the people. We also know from the story that Zacchaeus was a short man--not tall.

He had heard that Jesus was coming through his city. A crowd had gathered to see Jesus. In an effort to get a glimpse of Jesus, Zacchaeus climbed up into a sycamore tree to get a view. Eventually, Jesus came by--and he looked up and seeing Zacchaeus, said: "Hurry down, Zacchaeus, because I must stay at your house today." Zacchaeus scurried down from the tree and welcomed Jesus into his home. The crowd that had gathered,
seeing this began to grumble--"This man has gone as a guest to the home of a sinner!"

Something happened while Jesus was with Zacchaeus--Call it a Shoulder Tap--a prompting--causing Zacchaeus to act--for the record states, Zacchaeus told Jesus: "I will give half my belongings to the poor, and if I have cheated anyone, I will pay back four times as much." A conversion occurred--and instead of a passion to get--he now had a passion to give. All the result of a Shoulder Tap.

I recently heard another contemporary account about Shoulder Taps—It was about a man named Bill and his wife Toni that were dining at a place called California Pizza. While dining, Bill noticed an elderly woman come in and sit down at a table. She was nicely dressed. In addition, it appears that her daughter and several grandkids showed up to sit with her--ready for a nice meal. About that time, immediately a voice in his head told him--"You need to go over and tell the woman how pretty she looks." Bill and Toni's food arrives and they eat and then the check arrives and they prepare to go down to check out the local shops. Bill's wife stands up--Bill has not told her anything about what he had heard--He gets up and while on his way out he goes over to the elderly woman and kneels down and says --"If nobody else has told you today, I just want to tell you how lovely you look." And she looks at him with a look that he has never seen before and says: "I know you!" And Bill says--"No, you don't. I've never seen you before." But she says: "I know your spirit." She continues: "My husband died a year ago--and that is something that he would have said to me."
And at that moment Bill can't talk. He's overcome by emotion—and he just hugs her. Smiling at her through tears—and he leaves. But here's what he knows—God taps us on the shoulder and uses us at just the right moment. And what Bill knows for sure—that she was blest and he was enormously blest. So he has learned in his life to listen to those shoulder taps and he believes that the more we listen to them that we are more in alignment with God. And that is an awesome place to be.

Recently, I came across another example of Shoulder Taps—It comes from the life of a now-deceased Grand Lady, wife of one of our previous Presidents of the United States—Barbara Bush. On March 22, 1989, a motorcade with Barbara Bush, backed by the full force of Secret Service, pulled up to Grandma's House, a residential care home for children with HIV/AIDS, in Washington D.C. She exited the limo, and entered the home, greeting the people saying, "Thank you for inviting me into your home. George and I want to thank you for what you are doing for the children." As Mrs. Bush toured the facility, she entered the room of little Donovan, who, in rapidly failing health and frailty, began to whimper in his crib. As the workers lifted Donovan, Mrs. Bush turned and gave the workers her trademark look of confidence and said—"Debbie and Joan, you are providing great care and services, but give me that baby. You don't know what you are doing!" She placed the baby over her shoulder and closely caressing him—he immediately calmed. At a time when many believed such babies were "untouchables"—Barbara Bush exhibited a grandmother's genuine instinct to comfort and soothe a sick baby. Here—a Shoulder Tap from God.
God took Barbara Bush—tapped her on the shoulder and used her at just the right moment. She began changing attitudes.

I have shared with you examples of Shoulder Taps by God—and I think there is a key to Listening to Shoulder Taps from God.

The first key—PREPARATION. Preparation involves Prayer, Scriptural Understanding, and Group Support.

By Prayer—I mean the need for an emphasis less on tapping God on the shoulder and asking Him to do the work AND MORE on God tapping you on the shoulder with tasks for you to do. Remember the words from the prophet Isaiah 6.8f: "Then I heard the Lord say, 'Whom shall I send? Who will be our messenger?' I answered, "I will go! Send me!"

By Scriptural Understanding—I mean the need to read and discover the message God gives to us—consider it a training manual for the faithful.

By Group Support—I mean the need to lift up each other—share—build up one another in the faith—don't try to go it alone

The second key—ACTIVE LISTENING. It too involves 3 parts:
1. Have an Open Mind—Not a Mind that is closed like a Steel Trap
2. Have a willingness to be vulnerable—take risks in the faith
3. Always listen for God’s voice—for His Shoulder Tap

I believe that if we adopt these keys—God will put us into a place where He can work within us to build His Kingdom by His use of Shoulder Taps.

I want to close with a personal note. On February 28, 1998, I began what I have come to call JOURNEY THROUGH SCRIPTURE between the two services at First Christian Church. I had been asked to do a 30 minute lecture that would stand by itself each Sunday between the two worship Services—I was not to ask questions or ask anyone to read. With these
requirements, I agreed to the task--with the exception that I did try to make it where people would want to come back and hear more. I began with the use of a Jesuit priest's historical survey of the Bible. Each year since, the Journey has been different--but always with a scriptural basis. A couple of years ago, I became aware of a national tension over the issue of religion...a venomous hatred seemed to be developing--placing people of faith at odds with one another. I had thought of doing a study of World Religions--and yet, knowing Journey Through Scripture had always been exactly that--I passed on such a study. I was uneasy about it. Sometime later, our congregation had a guest speaker who had been a follower of the Islam religion--but had converted to Christianity. In his description of the Islamic faith, he portrayed virtually all Muslims as extremists and radicals. His presentation bothered me--for what little I knew--Judaism, Christianity, and Islam had a relationship--primarily the belief in one God.

I kept thinking about this--day and night--for a long while. But then, I felt God was wanting me to help others better understand these three religions--believe what others have called a Shoulder Tap from God happened to me. I finally took the risk. The experience of doing the study had both lows and highs--but at least, I answered the Shoulder Tap.

Remember: God has the ability to use each of us for His purposes--If we only listen.