

THE CHURCH THAT LOVES TO FISH

phil shows us all how to do it

TWO

One day a lady criticized the great nineteenth century evangelist D.L. Moody for his methods in personal and mass evangelism. Yes, she expressed this by telling him without any equivocation just how appalled she felt and how she couldn't stand how he was attempting to win people to Jesus Christ.

Moody answered, "I agree with you. I don't like the way I do it either. But tell me how you do it so I can learn."

The lady responded, "Oh, I don't do it."

Then Moody said, "Then I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it!"

Churches that love to fish are committed to teaching Christians how to lead others to Christ one on one and also one with gobs. The leaders themselves love to practice this evangelistic lifestyle—this habit of verbally witnessing out in the public where the unbeliever's are. Yes, they enjoy the challenge of telling the old story and their own story both on and off of the church premises.

But allow me to ask you a few questions: Do you believe the basics? Do we Christians really believe what we claim to believe? Are we convinced that there is a Heaven to gain and a Hell to shun? Are we convinced that the wages of sin is death? If so, how could we remain so nonchalant in telling others about Christ and the Gospel?

I challenge you right now with every fiber of my being to ask God in faith to simply give you a burden inside—a supernatural heart-felt concern for unbelievers in their horrible but often unnoticed spiritual plight. Christian, if you will do this, then I believe you will be most of the way there in getting ready to give an answer for the reason for the faith within you.

Are You Willing and Available or Nervous and Scared ...or All of the Above?

Think about that story of the "bad Samaritan"—the lost woman at the well? Jesus used such wisdom, respect, tender directness and relational tact in dealing with her and Rabbi's of that day just didn't associate with lady-folk—especially with wild socially-forward gentile women with ..you know... "that kind of reputation." But once this popular non-Jewess realized that Jesus was the Messiah, we see, ***"At this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, 'What do You seek?' or, 'Why are You talking with her?' The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, 'Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?' Then they went out of the city and came to Him"*** (Jn. 4:27-30 nkjv).

What's really excellent about all this is that through this woman just sharing her testimony and not even having been with Jesus that long, many Samaritan people came to Jesus that day. The Bible says, ***"Many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who***

testified, "He told me all that I ever did" (Jn. 4:39). And she wasn't even a perfect witness—she clearly exaggerated. There's no way that Jesus had the time to tell her all that she ever did. God used this imperfect representative even though none of us should exaggerate.

Listen, right next to having a close personal relationship with Jesus and to daily walking with Him, there is no greater blessing on earth or any privilege that we could experience than actually being used of God to lead another person to faith in Christ! How beautiful and glorious is that?

Now let's check out five major principles in the following Bible passage that you should apply in witnessing to others.

"An angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, 'Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' This is desert. So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go near and overtake this chariot.' So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' And he said, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. The place in the Scripture which he read was this: 'He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth.'¹ So the eunuch answered Philip and said, 'I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?' Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?' Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea" (Acts 8:26-40).

Here we see how God used one Christian man named Philip, to boldly witness to and win a man to faith in Jesus and we see two types of personal evangelism at work here. First, to set the scene, earlier in this same chapter, Philip is fully engaged in what many call "mass evangelism" as the Holy Spirit is saving people in a crowd one by one. Later, we see him doing "personal evangelism," as he talks one-on-one with a gentleman from Ethiopia. And God still likes to use both forms of evangelism today in getting His Good News out to those in need.

Principle A: Have a God-given Love for the Lost that you Prayed-in from Above

I don't know about you, but God doesn't send me an email each evening regarding the next days itinerary and witnessing opportunities that His is planning on bringing my way. That's why I must be ready each and every moment. You also don't know when God has specific plans for you at the outset of each day, that are very critical for the advance of His Kingdom on earth. You don't know in advance the days when He wants to use you in a powerful way in sharing His Good News with a very

influential person at work or maybe with a whole roomful of lost people like in a crowded hospital room where some of your friends and family have hurriedly gathered together due to someone's unexpected emergency. We've all got to be ready, for the rapture, for other's unfortunate tragedies, for witnessing in a non-offensive way (though some might be offended by the truth anyway) and for our own last days! Many people are not afforded a deathbed conversion experience or even a death bed for that matter. And our verbal witness will be totally hollow if we are not prayerfully prepared, or if we lack Christ's compassion for unbelievers with whom we are sharing. With all that in mind here are four basic truths that Billy Graham talks about and wants us to be aware of:

- 1) *Every unregenerate person has **a basic emptiness**, because the true and living God does not live inside of them.*
- 2) *Every person without Christ experiences **a certain loneliness** inside, because they were designed for fellowship with the Lord.*
- 3) *Every person born only once has **a sense of guilt** that they sense, because everyone has broken God's laws—His Top Ten List.*
- 4) *Every lost person feels **a universal fear of death**, because a Christless-grave and all that follows it, is the scariest thing there is!*

You and I are both probably around up-and-outers everyday—people who appear to "have it all together," with their high-end Sony laptops, their sharp designer clothes, their fast BMWs and their upwardly mobile attitudes of success, but no matter how much money, authority, material stuff, sex, or power they have, they still have a basic emptiness inside because God has set eternity in their hearts. He has created them for real significance and to have an eternal purpose that involves others. He has a calling and an exciting mission for them to fulfill, if they would just come to Christ in repentance and faith. Everyone on this planet whether they realize it or not, longs for the close intimate friendship of God, for inner security, for inner cleansing—the forgiveness of sin, for supernatural anointing, and for inner peace and joy. Many are searching for these things in buying that bigger home, in the perfect career, in eastern mysticism and in alcohol or drug trips, but nothing outside of Christ can fill that need for salvation. I'm not saying come to Christ for what you can get from Him or for a better life on earth. The never dying flames of the lake await many, and I don't want you going there! Jesus is your only way to escape them. Therefore as you recognize and understand these fundamentals about people that are in the greatest sort of need, I believe that you will possess a more intense desire to go tell them about the living hope that is within you.

Principle B: Go Fishing Where They Can be Found

While religious Saul (later known as the Apostle Paul), was aggressively dragging away Christians, persecuting a lot and causing gobs of havoc for the early church (v. 4), Philip was out joyfully preaching the Message of the Gospel wherever he went. ***“Then Phil went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them”*** (v. 5). And think of how the Jews were taught to literally hate the Samaritans. As a Jewish person, he would have been raised accustomed to that natural prejudice against the Samaritans. Yet, Philip was committed to following the lead of Jesus, who had actually planted the first "seed" in Samaria. You remember how Jewish Jesus earlier was fishing for a soul—the bad Samaritan lady at the well ...and how even her testifying to all those men there basically helped to prepare this town for the Gospel.

My point in mentioning this? Witnessing with enthusiasm out where the Spirit leads you can start a chain reaction! When we obey Him going where the irreligious people are we can expect thrilling results!

The Apostle Paul is the person who told us about this mysterious work of conversion through obedient Christians out sowing and reaping with the Word. He said: ***“I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor”*** (1 Cor. 3:6-8).

These verses show us how God often uses multiple saints to reach out, impact and effect a change—a born again experience—for someone in need of Christ, rather

than merely the efforts of one saint. We just need to remember to go fishing where the people are, and to use the righteous bait that’s appropriate that the people actually like. Why force old churchy music or something frowsy and frumpy on people that just won’t work? Don’t compromise and offer something worldly, but remember that the sinner needs to think it’s excellent! I say if it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing right.

“Do what Jesus called us to do, and that is to break out of that huddle and take Jesus and engage our world with the reality of Him through our lives. Now, how do you do that? That’s the big question. I have to say that merely hanging out in the church world and staying in these little cloistered environments that we craft for ourselves is really the easiest thing to do. When you really get a grip on the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to be the light of your world, to engage your world with Christ, then it gets trickier. It’s a little riskier; it takes a lot more discernment. Temptations are greater. You have to interface with people who don’t talk church-talk; they have a whole different language.”

—Joseph Stowell

Principle C: Be Open to the Holy Spirit's Promptings

Verse 29 says, "***Then the Spirit said...***" where Philip was to go. His mouth still works and He can communicate with you too. And Phil was spontaneous in the right way as He was led moment by moment ...by his reasoning? No way! The Holy Spirit of God led Philip by speaking in his human spirit. "...***said to Philip, 'Go near and overtake this chariot.'***" It was because that was where the unbeliever was located. Directed service matters! This can make all the difference in sharing one's faith. If you have your hooks down in the water in the wrong place, you might just come up with some seaweed or a rubber tire. In days gone by, Jesus' fishermen caught nothing out on the lake until they listened to Him tell them where to cast their net (see Jn. 21:4-6).

How does God's Spirit direct us today? What does he tell us to use? Well, I'm not sure about all of the methods and recourses He wants you to use to win people, but with some things He is very clear. Remember Paul's words to Timothy, "***Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season***" (2 Tim. 4:2). You too need to preach the Word. We all need to be listening to the Lord in how to do this too. As Jesus said, "***My sheep hear My voice... and they follow me***" (Jn. 10:27). It may come to you in the form of an "impression," or a sense of burden for an individual might give you a good idea that the inner Witness of God jumps on. But you need to test all things and take it as a possible leading from the Lord Himself. Be open to the Spirit's moment by moment inner promptings.

Principle D: Be Obedient to God's Leading

Back in verse 27 we read this about Philip: "***So he arose and went***" (v. 27). He was obedient to the Lord's promptings and leading. One way to measure spiritual maturity in a person is by seeing how

One way to measure spiritual maturity in a person is by seeing how long it takes between the time when that person receives a clear directive from the Lord, to test it in the light of Scripture and the time when they actually start to go about doing what they were told to do, in the way they were told to do it.

long it takes between the time when that person receives a clear authoritative directive from the Lord, then testing it in the light of Scripture and the time when they actually start to go about doing what they were told to do, in the way they were told to do it. You remember how God told another individual to "***get up and go***"—and that guy named: "***Jonah arose and went to Nineveh***"—yup, he hung a 180 and went in the opposite direction! And there's a word for that: "disobedient" but after a little gentle persuasion from above, he finally saw it God's way. God then used him to lead the greatest revival in human history.

But back to Philip's story. He could have easily had a bad attitude, grumbled, murmured, had the wrong motive, disliked the people God loved or even questioned the logic of such a divine decision. After all, he was in the midst of a full-scale revival in

Samaria, with many people coming into righteousness, a number of miracles were being performed, and people were even getting delivered from demons. He could have argued with the angel, "***What up? Me leave this successful ministry here—this mighty work in Samaria to go to that bone dry desert? Do***

you really mean me the great evangelist; depart from the big high profile meeting to go to one person in that lonely desert? But who will see me there? Mr. Angel sir, I'm sure you're reasonable. Please listen here for a minute. I am like eighty miles away from where you want me to go. The apostles and other believers that can also witness are must closer—at least 30 miles closer. Why don't you just use one of those guys?"

But Phil did not argue, whine or gripe. He simply obeyed the Lord—even if he did not completely get it. He might have been challenged a bit to understand why God was having him even do this mission. Was he in God's will? Yes! And God knew that Philip was the right man for the job. God had uniquely prepared both Philip and his subject for this very important moment.

Christian, God is uniquely preparing you, as well. But if you do not obey and “seize the opportunity,” God will find another person to take your place. God doesn't need you or me to get His job done. Do you remember Mordecai and how it was in the story of Queen Esther his cousin? Mordecai really understood about what God wanted done on earth, and he voiced this to Esther, ***"If you keep quiet at this time, someone else will help and save the Jewish people, but you and your father's family will all die. And who knows, you may have been chosen queen for just such a time as this"*** (Esth. 4:14 NCV). The highlight of your life's ministry—the greatest moment of your entire existence on this planet that God has been preparing you for during the last couple decades—could be fulfilled in just a matter of a couple hours. That's why we need to take every encounter seriously, every hour of every day seriously.

When God directs you to "go" and do something, He sees the end from the beginning. He sees the "big picture," while we are limited to see only the small one. Again, God doesn't typically give us a detailed email memo in advance, but instead He leads us one step at a time. The Bible says of Scripture: ***"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"*** (Prov. 6:23). If you are unwilling to take the first step, don't expect Him to give you the second!

Yes, God decides to move His man Philip out of a great evangelistic revival to reach one single man. He always has His reasons for everything He does and we must trust Him. This historical event shows that God is keenly interested in individuals. As in the parable of the lost sheep, we're talking about the Shepherd who would leave the ninety nine sheep to go search and find that one lost lamb. You and I matter to Him and therefore every sinner should matter to you and me.

Principle E: Be Righteously Considerate, Respectful and Clear

Remember K.I.S.S.—Keep is simple saint! That's what God wants. Preach the Gospel in a clear straightforward way without getting sidetracked onto worthless rabbit trails. Make sure your point gets across. Ask questions, wait for the interaction. Rephrase what you're saying in couple different ways if need be, just to make sure they are tracking with you. When Philip approached the Ethiopian rep, he asked, ***"Do you understand what you are reading?"*** (v. 30). He does not start out with a statement like, "Are you saved, dude, or just clueless as a lizard?" or "Yo, hey there, do you know that you are going to hell?" No. Instead, Philip carries on a dialogue with this person. He speaks, and then gives the man a chance to respond and then listens carefully.

One of the best things you can do in witnessing to someone is to make it a two way street of communication so to speak. Concentrate on listening to that person for awhile. Find out what they are into and why? Find out who or what they are trusting in. Ask the person about their opinions, their situation, their preferences and their thoughts. Then build the bridge from there. That is exactly what Jesus did. Jesus gave us a great example to go by as we look at His one-on-one fishing encounters with individuals He cared about.

The eunuch resounded to Philip's question with, "***How can I, unless someone guides me?***" (v. 31). And God will use you to guide open people spiritually as you point them to God's Solution. "***But before people can ask the Lord for help, they must believe in him; and before they can believe in him, they must hear about him; and for them to hear about the Lord, someone must tell them***" (Rom. 10:14 ncv).

Being a great witness with your life is important, but is a so called silent witness enough to lead someone into righteousness? Phil was not too afraid to open his mouth as well walk his talk because faith comes from hearing. God could have chose angels to go tell, but He did not. He has appointed Christians to be witnesses. "***Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the Message preached to save those who believe***" (1 Cor. 1:20-21).

This last verse does not say that "***it pleased God through foolish preaching to save...***" or "***it pleased God through cutting edge Christian entertainment to save those who believe.***" It says "***through the foolishness of the message preached.***" In other words, God saves open people through the simple Message of the Gospel, as Christians pray, hear, are directed by the Lord and as they lovingly tell sinners the Good News.

You shouldn't feel like, Hey, I'm so special and I can save people, because you can not. But as you humbly trust in the Lord, He can save people through you.

- You don't have to be a star baby to shine in this role...
though you do need to be willing and available.
- You do not have to be a Church theologian to start sharing your faith...
though you do need to get in the Word and know your Bible.
- You do not have to memorize the answer to every possible question...
though you can find answers for each question you are asked.
- You don't have to become a "master communicator" to fish for and hook souls...
but God will with your obedience and practice, make you more and more effective as the years roll by.

Maybe you're an ordinary normal Joe like me who works forty hours in some normal everyday type of secular job? Maybe your life often seems mundane and non-spectacular? Maybe you often feel like God isn't even listening to your prayers in secret? Maybe, in the natural, you are a shy person who doesn't like to draw attention to yourself? Great! We all need to depend on Him. And while the opportunities that God gives you to share your faith may not seem to be hugely dramatic like in some Hollywood movies, they are just as significant to Christ and important for those who will hear. If you follow these biblical principles in fishing for people, like Philip from the book of Acts, you will surely see God use intervene and use you to work his greatest miracle.

¹ Philip wisely took advantage of the opportunities that God opened up for him and used the Word in fishing. He preached for Christ's glory—aiming horizontally for repentance and lasting decisions. There's nothing wrong with that! Too many of us witness without expecting God to intervene in the person's life. See Isaiah 53:7, 8