

THE CHURCH THAT LOVES TO FISH

follow close after Jesus in witnessing

THREE

It is "this gospel of the kingdom," preached in the power of God, confirmed by signs and wonders and divers miracles, that always produces the greatest evangelistic triumphs in any generation. – T.L. Osborn

**The missionary spirit is the spirit of Jesus, the spirit of the incarnation and the Cross.
– Hudson Taylor**

In the previous two chapters we've talked about some basic personal evangelism principles. It's fun to see how people in the Bible used to witness to friends and strangers! We've looked at Acts chapter eight and that great witness for the Lord named, Philip. Man, was he effective in planting seeds, in watering and in reaping the harvest. He was a fisher of men. In this chapter we'll look at some more principles and give you some bait ideas. Again to review:

1. *We must pray for a God-given, non-fake, motivating love for unbelievers.*
2. *We must occasionally leave the company of the redeemed to go to those in need of Christ's greatest miracle.*
3. *We must daily be open and available to the gentle guidance of the Holy Spirit.*
4. *We must be committed and obedient to the calling of God and to His important directives.*
5. *We must learn to be tactful, clear, empathetic and at ease around sinners of every race, religion, preference and background.*

Now returning to Acts 8:26-40, we see more important fishing principles for effective evangelism:

Principle F: We Must Learn to Adapt to the Situation

God led Philip to a visiting dignitary from Ethiopia who had actually come to Jerusalem searching for God. He didn't even need bait at this point; The Holy Spirit had been working with Him to the point where he was just looking to get caught. The para experience with the Spirit happens with everyone who desires to be caught by the Lord. The Ethiopian was reading from the book of Isaiah at the time. You could call it a "divine set-up."

We saw how Philip assessed the situation by asking the man about his reading material (v. 30). When he finds out that the man was reading from Isaiah chapter 53 (a chapter that speaks prophetically of Jesus Christ before He was born of a virgin), Phil adapted his fishing message accordingly: "*Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told _ him the good news about Jesus*" (v. 35).

Philip found some "*common ground*" upon which to build a bridge that his message could go across. The Apostle Paul spoke of this in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (NCV):

"I am free and belong to no one. But I make myself a slave to all people to win as many as I can. To the Jews I became like a Jew to win the Jews. I myself am not ruled by the law. But to those who are ruled by the law I became like a person who is ruled by the law. I did this to win those who are ruled by the law. To those who are without the law I became like a person who is without the law. I did this to win those people who are without the law. (But really, I am not without God's law—I am ruled by Christ's law.) To those who are weak, I became weak so I could win the weak. I have become all things to all people so I could save some of them in any way possible. I do all this because of the Good News and so I can share in its blessings."

Jesus said, "*Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men*" (Matt. 4:19 nkjv). A more literal rendering of this verse would be: "I will make you catch men alive." This Greek verb is unique here, and it is used in only one other place in the Bible. In speaking of the unbeliever, 2 Timothy 2:26 says, "*And they may wake up and escape from the trap of the devil, who catches them to do what he wants.*" The New King James version says it very clear, "*that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive (caught alive) to do his will.*"

What am I trying to say? Well, according to these two passages of Scripture, by prayer, faith and the power of the Spirit, we can witness to people by our attitudes, words and deeds to the point where we "catch men and women alive." And think about it, if we won't, the devil will "catch people."

Principle G: We Need to Choose Fitting Bait that People Like

The Gospel is come and go. Jesus said "*Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden.*" He also said "*Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel.*" Most churches that want to fish, want to do this inside the four walls of their building. So I would say be different and lean toward a go-tell-mentality first. As the people go, if they run into people who are just not ready, then it's a good time to leave literature and invite the neighbors to come hear.

And the church that wants to do outreach without wasting a bunch of time, money and recourses will want to have corporate prayer meetings and also do their homework in advance to find out what would be a real draw for people in their area, so the people will want to come hear the Gospel. Finding the right bait to use is so very important, and it will probably cost some money! Fishermen study their target fish and they invest money in getting the right bait before they go out to fish. Just as experienced fishermen use specific baits and lures to catch certain fish, we also need to use different "bait" as we go "fishing to catch people alive" in the sea of life. Jesus' character, love and words were luring for sinners. Again, Christ gives us the perfect example in this regard.

Throughout the four gospel accounts, He never deals with any two people in exactly the same way.

- *To a woman who had spent a lifetime trying to fill that empty void in her life, with one failed relationship with men after another, Jesus spoke of the deepest spiritual thirst a person could have (see John 4:5-29).*
- *To a man of tremendous intellect who was an expert in theology, Jesus spoke in almost childlike terms about the need to be “born again” (see John 3:1-21).*
- *To a lonely, friendless outcast perched high up in a tree, just so he could catch a glimpse of Jesus in the throng of the crowd, Jesus offered spontaneous genuine friendship, calling him down to go have a meal together. (see Luke 19:1-10).*
- *To a woman actually caught in the heinous act of adultery who was deserving of judgment, Jesus spoke of mercy (John 8:3-11).*

Just like our Lord did, we need to give people the gift of time, ears, love, respect and then simply recognize their specific needs and how to address them. Some need straightforward tough love and they would even appreciate your bluntness. All of them as individuals are precious and valuable!

My wife and I used modern music as bait for years in Europe (Hey, God never created a sinful note)—different kinds of Christian bands indoor and out, Christian comedians, movies with a message, drama, mimes, campouts, mountain biking, boating, mountain climbing in different countries, skateboard contests, volleyball, cookouts, home Bible study meetings, surfing, sailing. We employed groups that did feats of strength ...whatever would get a crowd without compromising. And people are into all kinds of things and besides many don't know that it is ok for Christians to laugh and have fun.

***The love of Christ
constrains us! There is
no other motivation for
missionary service that is
going to survive the
blows of even the first
year. You do it for Him!
—Elisabeth Elliot***

We need to see people like Christ sees them as we present the Gospel to them in the specific way that He would have us do this. They have potential. Many unbelievers in Europe and in the States were all too happy to help us with the practical aspects of putting together an evangelistic event when we asked them for help and some even remained there on the property at the time the altar call was presented. Yup, they stood there and listened when it was time to stop the activities, and take a break to have ordinary people share their testimonies and explain the Gospel Message. Just remember, God is looking for responsible “sharpshooters,” more than haphazard “machine gunners.”

Principle H: We Must Know the Scriptures

Philip was easily able to begin with the passage the man was reading and then lead him through other Scripture passages to point this man to his only viable Solution—Jesus. This principle is absolutely essential for anyone who wants to lead others to Jesus Christ. But what if Philip had not been a person who kept his nose in the Scriptures when he was asked about that passage?

What a bummer that would be! Not only would he have felt ashamed, but he could have possibly lost the opportunity to lead this man to into a personal relationship with Christ.

That is why the apostle Paul encouraged Timothy, his son in the faith, to **"Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth"** (2 Tim. 2:15 nlt). In this same vein of thinking, The apostle Peter wrote, **"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect"** (1 Pet. 3:15). Ask God to fill you up with his revival passion and also to help you learn to love the Scriptures every single day! Become adept at wielding the sword, but not to hurt and wound people. We each are responsible for having our own lives in order with God, but we can be there to help our neighbor if they are open to this.

Just as a skilled artist would know how to use their brushes and pens...

Just as an experienced builder would know to hold and use his tools...

Just as an ancient soldier would know his penetrate with sword...

We must know the Scriptures and the Author who wrote them.

Why should we know the Bible? Because God's Word will not return void when we are out witnessing in the Spirit! When it comes to boldly sharing our faith, there is nothing more effective than quoting the right Bible verse at the right time. We all have so many opinions about

Billy Graham said, "Time and time again in my ministry, I have quoted a Bible verse in a sermon - sometimes without planning to do so in advance - and had someone tell me afterward that it was that verse which the Holy Spirit used to bring conviction of faith to him. **'Is not My word like a fire?' says the LORD, 'And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?'"** (Jer. 23:29).

so many things and my opinions are no better than the next guy's—our opinions can return void. God calls us to be faithful. He tells us to preach the Word. God Himself said, **"Rain and snow fall from the sky and don't return without watering the ground. They cause the plants to sprout and grow, making seeds for the farmer and bread for the people. The same thing is true of the words I speak. They will not return to me empty. They make the things happen that I want to happen, and they succeed in doing what I send them to do."** (Isa. 55:10-11).

Our simple Message is beautiful because Christ's personality and character is so beautiful! I don't see how anyone could ever resist the Holy Spirit's wooing and reject coming to Christ. God has given us a simple yet very profound Message to deliver. It's the Good News of salvation through Christ—there is no other! We don't need to candy-coat it, water it down, exaggerate it, gloss it over, add or

subtract anything from it. We just need to present it authoritatively with all of its power as God presented it to people when He walked on this earthly terra firma here below. That would be good!

Yes, the technical definition of the word "Gospel" is "Good News." Yet, to truly appreciate the "Good News" of God's grace, mercy, agape love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ, one must first understand the "bad news" about sin and judgment. The bad news is that we all stand as sinners before a Holy Judge and because he is good, He will judge sin and punish the unrepentant. When it is all said and done, we all will be able to say Wow! How equitable. God really handled things right. No matter who we are, we have all sinned and broken His Ten Commandments. Sometimes we did this in ignorance, but often we did this intentionally. For this reason, hardened sinners stand condemned and the wrath of God literally abides upon them. The Bible says, ***"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all"*** (Jam. 2:10).

Seeing our complete weakness and inability to rescue ourselves or do anything positive to alleviate our wretched spiritual condition, God did the ultimate thing for us: ***"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"*** (Rom. 5:8). But maybe you are asking yourself what is the Gospel exactly—the Gospel in a nutshell so to speak?

The apostle Paul unpacks it for you, giving a concise summation of the Gospel Message in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5 saying: ***"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you; unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures..."*** Never forget that the capstone of the Gospel Message is the physical death and physical resurrection of Jesus Christ.

***Deliver those who
are drawn toward
death, and hold
back those
stumbling to the
slaughter.
—Proverbs 24:11***

You know of Paul who was raised in Tarsus of Cilicia a heavily hellenized town in what is now Turkey. He was thoroughly schooled in biblical law, as well as in the wisdom of Greece. He spoke Aramaic and Hebrew fluently. He had an excellent teacher in rabbi Gamaliel who taught him about the Scriptures in Hebrew and was actually the grandson of Hilliel, the most famous of Jewish rabbis during Jesus' time. Paul was a former persecutor of "The Way," and after his conversion he learned to lay out the Gospel Message brilliantly as a skilled and anointed orator. But get this; he relied upon the Holy Spirit rather than his own abilities and learning. Yes, he absolutely refused to "lean upon" his incredible intellect in his preaching. Instead, he stuck to the basics of the Gospel message. He tells the Corinthians—***"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified"*** (1 Cor. 2:1-2).

Paul also writes, ***"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect"*** (1 Cor. 1:17).

Principle I: We Need Learn How to Tell our Own Story Pointing to Christ

Another cool thing about Paul's preaching was how he would interweave and incorporate his own personal testimony into the Message he delivered. Please read again about the accounts in

the book of Acts where Paul presented the Gospel before such people as the high ranking government officials and such. He would often begin with his personal testimony, because who in their right mind would argue with that? Then, he would always make a beeline with his verbal Message to the Person of Christ and what Christ accomplished on the cross for all of us. How exciting and you and I can follow his fishing example when we witness. If we are truly born again, we will truly have a testimony of how we came into such a wonderful loving relationship (rather than a legal relationship) with God. Yes, we all should use the testimony God gave us of how Christ has changed our lives. In sharing it with others, however, we should keep ourselves from all exaggeration and self-glorification. We don't need to go into all the gory details of our past life and get all excited about that old moldy stuff. No, we need to stay focused upon what God has done for us and will do for them if they repent.

Remember, no one else has your testimony. It is one way to build a firm bridge of communication with a skeptical but open unbeliever. And it is an excellent way in our times of conversation to return to the source of our hope: Christ and His blood stained cross. That is where the power is! What is more important than that? Just like Philip did, as you apply these basic evangelistic principles, you need to expect the Lord to join into the process and quicken the right verses back to your memory. Expect him to give you the words of truth that are most fitting to lead that person to faith right there on the spot. You don't need to waste your time with the really closed person—just pray for them.¹ The Bible says, ***“Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words”*** (Prov. 23:9) and, ***“Excellent speech is not becoming to a fool”*** (Prov. 17:7). Jesus warned His disciples ***“Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces. Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you”*** (Matt. 7:7).

It's interesting that Christ talked about this in the context of prayer. You see, spiritual dogs will not appreciate that which is holy and spiritual pigs will not be grateful for the beauty of pearls for free, so why force them upon them? The Bible says, ***“Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you”*** (Prov. 9:8). It's all about discerning and sensitivity. You don't ever need to become pushy or obnoxious or be quick to accept a “yes” from seemingly open people, when their heart is still saying “Hey, let's give it a bit more time” or even accept a “no” if you sense the person's heart is really saying “yes, now is the time to repent and believe.” May our passionate God guide you with His Church into really effective fishing for souls!

¹ Look at what the disciples did when they dealt with closed-minded people in Act 13:49-52. They were simply out fishing for souls, but this was closed-minded-group-think was a problem. And check out what Jesus told his disciples to do when they were dealing with closed people in Luke 10:10-11. Scoffing and closed-mindedness can infect a whole group against the truth and you don't ever want to be apart of that.