

INTRODUCTION

This is the third message from the Gospel According to Mark. I was walking along the shores of the Sea of Galilee just a few days ago where Jesus called His disciples. I got up before sunrise and went out with my Bible to watch the same sun rise over the same mountains around the same lake where Jesus walked. After the sunrise, I saw a fishing boat chugging out to spread a net to catch fish.

I was reminded again that the story of Jesus isn't some religious myth. It's a real story about real people and how Jesus changed their lives.

Mark 1:14-20. "After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!' As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.' At once they left their nets and followed him. When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him."

Jesus didn't say, "Follow rules." He said, "Follow me." The Christian life isn't a bunch of rules, regulations, and rituals. It is simply following Jesus. Salvation isn't in a creed embracing beliefs. Salvation isn't in a creek getting baptized. Salvation is in Christ.

When we follow Jesus we want to do what He does. Jesus didn't come primarily to heal. If that had been his focus, He would have established a hospital. He didn't come primarily to teach or else He would have founded a school. He came to seek and to save that which is lost. When we follow Him that will be our passion as well.

Fishing for men means bringing people to Jesus. Do you know why Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John to be fishers of men? Because they were already fishermen. They knew how to catch fish. When Jesus called Matthew, the tax collector, He didn't tell him to fish for men. But Matthew went fishing anyway; he hosted a dinner so all of his tax-collector buddies could meet Jesus.

Jesus wants you to use whatever you already know to bring people into a relationship with Him. For instance, here's what He might say to you according to your profession: If you're a banker or investment advisor He might say, "Follow me and you can tell people about the best eternal investment they'll ever make." If you're an Educator, He might say, "Follow me and you'll teach eternal truth." If you're a CPA He might say, "Follow me and I'll show you how to help people balance their lives." If you're a physician, "Follow me and I'll show you how to practice spiritual healing." If you're in sales, "Follow me and you can sell the world's greatest product – eternal life." If you're a builder, "Follow me and you'll show people how to build stable lives." If you're a dentist, "Follow me and you can fill the void in people's lives." Whatever it is that you do, Jesus wants you to use what you know to bring people into a relationship with Him. So, what would He say to you? "Follow me and ... you fill in the blank."

Jesus talked about fishing for people to four fishermen, so I want to share with you five fishing tips. But you can apply these to whatever field you work in as well.

1. GOOD FISHERMEN GO WHERE THE FISH ARE LOCATED

I saw a funny picture once about a guy fishing in a large pothole in the middle of the road. It had water in it, but he picked the wrong place to fish because there weren't any fish there. You'll never catch fish until you're willing to leave your house and go to where the fish are.

A few years ago, we had a professional bass fisherman in the church, Jay Yelas. Jay is a great guy who loves the Lord. We talked a lot about fishing, but we never fished until one day we loaded up and went to Lake Tyler. The fish weren't really biting that day, but Jay was so good that he still caught seven or eight nice bass. I was skunked. I was sitting just eight feet away, but I hadn't landed a single fish. Toward the end of the day, my rod doubled over as I snagged something really heavy. I just knew it was a whopper. When I finally reeled it up to the edge of the boat we looked down and saw that I had caught a huge...turtle. It must have weighed six or eight pounds. Somehow I managed to hook the poor turtle on the neck of his shell. Jay did a good job hiding his laughter and declared that if a pro turtle circuit ever started up, I would certainly qualify! I was thoroughly humbled but I learned a lot by watching a bass master fish.

You can't go fishing unless you go out to where the fish are found. People without Christ aren't knocking down the doors of our church to get in. We have to go out after them. That's why the Great Commission of Jesus begins with the word, "GO."

In Luke 14 Jesus compared the Kingdom of God to a man who threw a party. All the local VIPs were sent invitations. But they all came up with phony excuses why they couldn't come. Jesus said, "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.'" (Luke 14:23)

God wants His house to be full. We're not talking about the church house, but the household of faith. There are thousands of people who aren't yet in the Family of God, and God wants us to go after them and tell them that God loves them.

Max Lucado wrote, "Jesus wasn't crucified in a church building over a baptistery between an organ and a piano—in front of a bunch of coats and ties. He was crucified on a cruel cross between two hardened criminals. He wasn't crucified in a nice neighborhood, but at a crossroads of the world so cosmopolitan that his crime had to be written in three languages. He died at the kind of place where thieves cursed and soldiers gambled—and that's where we need to take the Gospel."

2. GOOD FISHERMEN UNDERSTAND HOW FISH BEHAVE

One of my favorite episodes of the "Andy Griffith Show" was about fishing. Opie was little and Aunt Bee came to visit on a trial basis. She was trying desperately to fit in so Opie would like her. She agreed to go fishing with Andy and Opie. She didn't know much about fishing because she was holding her bait a few feet above the surface of the water. When Opie pointed it out,

Andy was quick to give an answer that saved Aunt Bee any embarrassment. He explained to Opie that Aunt Bee was such a good fisherman that she was fishing for "flying fish." That satisfied Opie. It was obvious Aunt Bee didn't understand how fish act.

If we are going to reach people for Christ, we must understand their world. We need to study our culture without buying into it. You don't have to become a fish to understand how a fish acts. You don't have to become a lost person to understand them either.

That means we should intentionally make friends with people who don't know Christ. The sad truth is the longer a person follows Jesus, the fewer friends they have who need Jesus. That's only natural. We want to hang out with other Christians. But Jesus was a friend of sinners. He spent time eating and fellowship with the worst of the worst. The Jewish leaders criticized Jesus for eating with sinners. He responded that only sick people need a doctor. The Jewish leaders were sick too; they just wouldn't admit it.

In Luke 16 Jesus told one of His strangest parables. He talked about a dishonest accountant who cooked the books of his boss. He was going to get fired. But before he lost his job, he approached his master's customers and gave them deep discounts on what they owed his boss. He was hoping that after he was sacked, they would repay his gesture. His boss heard about it and complimented him on being so shrewd, and he let him keep his job. Jesus summarized the parable by saying, "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light." (Luke 16:8)

Notice Jesus divided all the people of the world into two categories. There are "the people of this world" and "people of the light." The people of this world are those who don't know Jesus. They have bought into the values and culture of this world – that's all they have. But we are people of the light, we've been shown a different way.

We must never forget Jesus wasn't really talking about catching fish. He was talking about capturing people who are lost and bringing them into a saving relationship with Him. It's not politically correct to talk about unbelievers dying and going to hell. But Jesus Himself said He came to seek and to save those who are lost.

Leonard Ravenhill writes about an English criminal named Charlie Peace. When England still executed prisoners, Charlie Peace was on death row in Armley Prison, in Leeds, West Yorkshire, England. On the morning of his execution, a prison chaplain was dutifully reading a passage of scripture to Charlie. The passage spoke of heaven and hell. Charlie Peace said to the indifferent chaplain, "Sir, if I believed what you and the Church of England say that you believe about heaven and hell—even if England were covered with broken glass from coast to coast—I would walk over it, if need be on my hands and knees, and think it a worthwhile living just to save one soul from an eternal hell like that."

3. GOOD FISHERMEN USE A VARIETY OF STRATEGIES

There are a lot of different ways to catch fish. You can use a net from a boat, a cast net, a

trotline, or a rod and reel. When it comes to reaching people for Christ, good fishermen use a variety of methods as well. When most people think of evangelism, they think about Billy Graham. For more than sixty years, Billy Graham preached huge crusades around the world. He has shared the Gospel face-to-face with more people than any person in history. He once spoke to a million people in a crusade in India. When it comes to fishing for people, Dr. Graham has used a huge net. He's like one of those commercial trawlers that spreads a huge net and catches thousands of fish.

That intimidates most of us and we say, "I'm no Billy Graham." That's true, but the first time I ever caught a fish I was using a cane pole with a cork and a worm on the hook. No two people are alike so there is no single approach to person evangelism that will work. Different people need different approaches. The same strategy won't work for everyone.

That's exactly what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:22, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." He used one approach when he talked to Jews and another approach when he talked to Gentiles. When he spoke to the wisest philosophers in Athens, Greece, he used an intellectual argument and even quoted one of their own poets.

Over the last two months, I've been challenging you to perform acts of kindness in Jesus' name, and give a kindness card. The card says, "This act of kindness was done to show you God's love in a practical way." We've heard lots of stories. Vickie Johnson posted this on Facebook: "A few Sundays ago Pastor David told about a woman who paid for the order of the car behind her at Chick-fil-A and when she got home, there was an extra sandwich in her bag that she had not ordered and that was kind of like God's reward to her for her act of kindness. Well, I have one better than that!! I decided that because it is Valentine's Day, I would go to Chick-fil-A and pay for TWO cars behind me. So, when I got up to the window, I told the fella' that I wanted to pay for the 2 cars behind me and I gave him two little kindness cards to hand to them. He looked at the cash register and then looked at me with a stunned look on his face. He said, 'Well ma'am, you are the 100th customer, so it will all be free!!!!' Isn't God awesome?"

We still have hundreds of those kindness cards at the Welcome Center, so stop by and grab someone and go out and bless someone in Jesus' name. That's one of the easiest ways to fish for people.

4. GOOD FISHERMEN EXPECT TO CATCH FISH

One of the funniest stories about fishing was told by the country comedian, Jerry Clower. He talked about Claude Ledbetter in Mississippi who was catching a boat load of fish when nobody else was bringing any home. A state game warden decided to ride out with Claude to investigate his fishing methods.

After arriving in the middle of the lake, Claude reached under the seat, pulled out a long stick of dynamite, lit it and tossed it into the water. KABOOM! In a few seconds, dead fish floated to the surface all around the boat, and Claude used a dip net to bring them into the boat. The game warden was enraged. He flashed his badge and said, "Bubba, that is illegal, and I'm going to

arrest you. You can't fish with dynamite!"

Old Claude didn't say a word. He just lit another stick of dynamite and thrust it into the game warden's hand. While the fuse sizzled Claude said, "Are you gonna' TALK or are you gonna' FISH?" I don't recommend his method, but Bubba was expecting to catch fish!

Good fishermen always EXPECT to catch fish, even if they don't. There's a measure of faith involved because you usually can't see the fish. You suspect they're there, and you're hoping that they'll take the hook.

It takes real faith to share your faith with others as well. You're not putting faith in yourself, or your skill. You aren't putting your faith in the person who needs Jesus. You put your faith in Jesus. You have to believe Jesus can and will help the person.

In Matthew 9, two blind men came to Jesus asking for help. Jesus said, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied. Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith will it be done to you." (Matthew 9:28-29) If they hadn't believed Jesus could heal them, they wouldn't have experienced sight. But their faith was rewarded with the power of Jesus.

In order to be an effective witness, you have to have absolute confidence that Jesus can make a difference in the lives of the people you know. If you don't expect people to accept Christ, chances are they won't.

5. GOOD FISHERMEN ARE PATIENT IF THEY DON'T CATCH FISH IMMEDIATELY

Good fishermen are patient. If they don't catch fish after the first twenty or thirty catches, they don't load up and go home. They may move to another spot, or try different bait, but they're going to keep on fishing.

Sometimes believers feel guilty because they don't have a great deal of success landing fish. They hear stories of people who have led hundreds of people to Christ, and they feel intimidated. They say, "I even have a hard time starting a conversation with someone about spiritual matters."

Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will MAKE you fishers of men." In other words, it's a process. The longer you follow Jesus, and the more closely you follow Him, the more He will make you into a fisher of men.

The Bible says, "Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm." (James 5:7-8)

When you're fishing, patience isn't just a virtue; it's a necessity. Not too many fish are going to jump into your boat. A fish is easily spooked and will try to get away. A person without Jesus may often resist and even resent your attempt to share Christ with them. That's okay. Love them,

and keep showing them God's love. Keep praying for them.

George Müller of Bristol was a great preacher in the 1800s. He ran an orphanage that cared for over 100,000 children and he also established over 100 schools. Müller was a great man of faith.

In his journal, Müller recorded that one day he started praying for five of his friends to come to Christ. After many months, one of them came to the Lord. Ten years later, two others were converted. It took 25 years before the fourth man was saved. Müller persevered in prayer until his death for the fifth friend, and throughout those 52 years he never gave up hoping he would accept Christ. Müller died at age 78, and his faith was rewarded. For soon after Müller's funeral the last man gave his heart to Christ.

CONCLUSION

I know most of us here have been fishing, but there are probably a few folks who haven't. Let me ask: If you have never gone fishing, raise your hand. Now, here's the next question: how many of you who just raised your hand have ever caught a fish? You say, "That's a foolish question. If they haven't ever gone fishing, of course they haven't caught a fish." That's my point. I don't have to ask how many of you have ever led a person to Christ. Instead a better question is "How many of you have ever initiated a spiritual conversation with someone?" If you don't ever go fishing, for sure, you'll never catch fish.

Sometimes you go fishing and you don't catch a thing but it's still called going fishing because you went to where the fish were, and you wet your hook. You tried. God won't ask you how many fish you've caught. He's more interested in how many times you've gone fishing. He judges us on our obedience. Our job is to just share the gospel, whether anyone accepts Christ or not. The results are up to God. I saw a sign in front of a church recently that said: "Fishers of men. You catch 'em; and Jesus will clean them."

Radio commentator Paul Harvey once said, "Too many Christians are no longer fishers of men, but the keepers of the aquarium." Based on that comment, I've written a short parable I call, "The Fishing Society." Once there was a group of people called the Fishing Society. They gathered every week to talk about the importance of fishing, but they never fished. They decided to build a big new aquarium, so they pooled their money (no pun intended) and built a sparkling new meeting hall they named "The Aquarium Center."

Then they hired an expert who had a Doctor of Fishology to teach them from the Fishing Manual. Each week they gathered in their beautiful building and read portions of the Fishing Manual. The meetings ended with the expert dramatically casting a net in the large tank in the center of the Aquarium Center. The members rushed to the edge and were hopeful some fish would be caught. None were ever caught, of course, because there were no fish in the tank.

This led to disagreement among the members of the Fishing Society. Why weren't there fish in their beautiful aquarium? Some said, specialization was the answer so they built smaller tanks specially designed for fish of all ages and sizes. But, still, there were no fish.

They bought the newest and most modern fishing equipment on the market. They elected numerous committees to operate the Fishing Society more efficiently. One group regulated the water in the Aquarium. Others worked to keep the glass walls polished; others sorted and arranged the expensive fishing gear.

Finally, the Fishing Society decided to send a few brave members to go and live near the lakes and oceans. They called them "fishinaries." These foreign fishinaries emailed pictures of themselves standing by the water holding their catches of fish.

Over the years, some members of the Fishing Society forgot about fishing altogether. After all, there was plenty to keep them occupied in the aquarium. Some even suggested they change their name from "The Fishing Society" to just "The Society." After all, they didn't want to offend the fish.

One day a bearded stranger appeared at their aquarium. This longhaired, sandaled man claimed to be the Master Fisherman. He extended His hands to ask the members to follow him out and He would teach them how to catch fish with Him. They noticed the man had ugly scars in His palms—Probably from fishing. Nobody moved.

As He turned to leave He said, "If you never go fishing, you have no right to call yourself a fisherman. I'm going fishing, and if you aren't fishing—well, then, you aren't following me."

After their initial shock, the members of the Fishing Society resumed their busy activity of maintaining their beautiful hall. They were glad their beautiful hall had not been built in vain. If nothing else, it made them feel good about themselves.

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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