GO FISH SERIES:
Part 1: Why Fish?

Central Thought: We need to share Jesus because understanding of who Jesus is—is not intuitive. It must be declared and explained for people to understand, believe, and be saved.

INTRO VIDEO: Jeff on School Bus explaining personal feelings of failure and guilt in attempting to share his faith in High School.

Matt 4:18-20
18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 20 At once they left their nets and followed him.

Andy Stanley makes this observation: When Jesus called his disciples, he told them what he wanted to make them to be. He didn’t say, I want to make you to be more disciplined (although that would have been great). He didn’t say I want to make you more religious. He didn’t say, I want to make you more theologically astute so you can answer any questions about the mysteries of the universe.

He said...I want to make you to be something very special and very specific. I want to make you fishers of men.

Now it makes sense that he would use this metaphor. We know that at least four of his 12 disciples had been apprenticed in the fishing industry: James, John, Peter, and Andrew. Three of those four were actually in his inner circle (Peter, James, John).

It also makes sense that he would use this comparison because when he called them they were actually fishing at that moment. So he said, you have been an apprentice in the fishing business, and its great that you are good at catching fish and selling them for profit. But I am going to apprentice you in a brand new business with profit for eternity. I am going to teach you to do what I do and make you fishers of men.

This is still one of the primary objectives that Jesus has for his followers. So let’s ask the question: How many of you have chosen to follow Christ? Now if you are here and you have not done that yet, don’t feel embarrassed. Maybe you are considering it, maybe you don’t really understand the question. I am just trying to get those who have made this choice to own that fact that this is a decision that you have made.
Do you understand that this is an objective that Jesus had for you? He wants to make you a fisher of men. He is giving us a command which happens to be the title of our series: GO FISH.

Now here’s the problem: If you are like me, the idea of fishing for men, sharing your faith, talking about Jesus to people feels:

- Awkward – I was flipping through the channels the other night and came across a comedian. He started his routine by saying, ‘I have called you all here because...I want to talk to you about Jesus. (laughter)’ Then he asked the question, ‘is there more awkward moment in a conversation than when someone says, I want to talk to you about Jesus.’

- Inadequate – We have this sense that I want to do this, I know I should do this...but I don’t know what to say, or how to say it right. We fear people asking us something that we have no answer for (where did Adam’s kids get their wives or how did Noah get the dinasours on the ark or whatever).

- Guilty – We hear messages preached on the statement Jesus made: If you are ashamed of me before men, then I will be ashamed of you when we stand before my father in heaven. Wow. So there is a pressure to do this. And we understand about eternity, and heaven and hell, and the consequences of not knowing Jesus.

And we have family members that haven’t given their lives to Christ yet. Or maybe there is someone you sit by in homeroom every day. You talk about everything else, and you know they don’t know Jesus. Or there is a co-worker, or a friend you play ball with, or a girl friend who lives in the neighborhood...and you feel this sense that it would be great if you could talk about Christ...but how to do that?

Why risk the friendship? Why risk the rejection? Why come across all pushy or get branded as being all religious? Why fish?

That’s the question that we want to address. And how do we approach this Fishers of Men responsibility with confidence, cool, and effectiveness?

Let’s learn from the these guys in the Bible, the fishing apprentices that Jesus taught to be fishers of men. Turn in your Bible to Acts 3. Actually, we studied this passage a few months ago but lets revisit it from a new angle.

Here’s the context:

- The book of Acts is the record of what Jesus’ followers did after he was resurrected and ascended into heaven. What was their life like? What did they accomplish.
In chapter 3 we have the first recorded miracle in the ministry of Jesus’ followers—again after he had gone into heaven.

The person that was touched as a man who had been crippled from birth and had begged at the Temple gates for many years. He was well known in Jerusalem because of that.

And Peter and John were on their way to pray and in the middle of the trip, they experienced a divine appointment. They shared their faith in Jesus with this man.

Let’s read about it together:

Acts 3:4-8
4 Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" 5 So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. 6 Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." 7 Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. 8 He jumped to his feet and began to walk.

First, let’s talk about where the whole process started. It all began with a look. Verse 4 tells us that Peter looked straight at him. Now, Peter had been past this spot maybe hundreds of times before. He was there with Jesus just a few weeks before. Most certainly, he had seen this guy who begged at this temple gate.

Later in the this chapter, we see the reaction of the city to this man’s healing. You know how word spread...did you hear about the guy who used to beg at the gate called Beautiful? The crippled guy? Yes, him. Two of those Jesus followers healed him. It was unbelievable.

So the guy had a reputation. Peter and John would have known him to see him. But for this moment, Peter looked at him with fresh eyes. He saw the man’s need. He felt the man’s pain. He got in touch with what this man had to go through every day to drag himself out into public to beg.

This is where it started with Peter and John. The look reveals the motivation of a fisher of men. Let’s say it like this.

It begins with compassion not with compulsion.

The motive of Peter to do what he did was that he had compassion for the man. He became aware of his need. He was broken over the man. He wanted to do something for this man. His next steps all started from this desire to help.
What a difference that is from the whole compulsory motivation. Compulsion says, “I have to do this...I should do this...I ought to do this...if I don’t do this, I will let God down or fail in my requirements.’

Compassion says, “Wow...this man has some huge needs. What can I do to serve him, to help him, to relieve his suffering or encourage his heart.’

Compassion says, “how can I serve you?’ Compulsion says, 'how can I sell you?’

That’s part of why I struggled so much in High School to share my faith. I felt a little shady, pushy. It just didn’t feel right...pushing my faith on someone. Telling them my ideas were better. They should believe what I believe. David Andrews recently made an observation in one of our leadership meetings...people like to buy (when they are ready) but they don’t like to be sold.

Besides that, my personality just isn’t the sell type. That’s hard for me and for many people anyway. So Peter because he saw the man’s need had compassion for the man. He wasn’t trying to sell him anything. He simply wanted to serve him.

Do you know, that most people in our culture are tired of the ‘sell’ approach to the gospel. There is an almost built in resistance to that attitude.

Let me show a clip of 3 people who are being interviewed. They are not yet believers and they are being asked about their impression of born-again Christians.

PLAY VIDEO

Isn’t interesting what they said. Many times I have felt like it didn’t really matter what I said, or what I thought...they just wanted to convince me of their opinion. They were not willing to listen. Fair or not fair that is the impression that millions of people have about Christ-followers.

And I know it’s a played statement, but it is true: PEOPLE DON’T CARE HOW MUCH YOU KNOW UNTIL THEY KNOW HOW MUCH YOU CARE.

So the fishing for men process—begins with compassion not with compulsion. It starts by really seeing people for who they are and what needs they have. It starts by really listening to what people have to say without trying to have all the answers right away.
It starts with a desire to serve not a the need to make a sale.

And let me just say, if you are not yet a follower of Jesus and you have gotten the hard sale from someone who you felt just didn’t really care about your life or your beliefs...Let me say, I am very sorry. That is not the way that Jesus was. That is not the way Jesus disciple’s were.

Hopefully you will give the idea of Christ another chance?

Let’s go back to the text, Acts 3:
6 Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

First, we said—it starts with compassion not with compulsion. That’s the motivation. Next, it becomes attractive through demonstration.

Note what Peter says here...What I HAVE I give you.

That’s the second thing people want to know...not just do you care, but do you have something real. Has the gospel really changed you? Do you have anything to offer me that will really make a difference I my life?

Here’s my observation...people want more than just our opinions about things. They want more than just a new religion, a new philosophy of life, a lecture about theology. They want something with power with authenticity, and with authority.

That was one of the unique things about Jesus. They said if him, this is a teaching that is not just words. This teaching has punch. It has authority. It will change your life.

Mark Mittleberg wrote the book, Becoming a Contagious Christian. Such a great title...being contagious. You know how it works contagiousness...you have to have something to pass it along. In the negative, it may be germs. You have them, you can distribute them.

Infectious. Contagious. Passion is contagious. When I went to Nebraska for a pastor’s conference, I was affected by what they had...a passion for their football team. So now I wear a red hat and a red sweatshirt. It wasn’t their arguments that their team was the best that won me over. It was their passion.

So I guess this is the next question: What do you HAVE?
o A story? What has God done in your life? You can give that story to someone who is going through it. A very real practical testimony of God’s love, grace, faithfulness. Not pushing things on people, just opening your real life to people.
o Skills? You can help people with whatever they need. Serve them. With no strings attached. Just take what you can do and offer it. It doesn’t even have to be anything spiritually related.
o Stuff? You can give to meet needs. Baby-sit for a single mom. Contribute something of value to someone in need.

What else do you HAVE?
o The ability to PRAY. Very few people will turn down prayer. Tell them, I belong to a church that prays 24/7. Let us pray for you. In essence that’s what Peter and John did. We will pray for you in the authority of Jesus name. When they did, God stepped in and met the man’s need. And now there was real momentum in this whole thing.

It was not hard to share their faith in Christ. The man would have begged them to tell him more. Who is this Jesus who you declared when I went from being crippled to being healed?

If we have something real, with integrity, with a story of genuine change—it won’t be difficult to share our faith. People will be asking us.

This same guy we are talking about, Peter—wrote a letter to the churches. He said it like this: 1 Peter 3:15-17

*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, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

If we are giving an answer, it means that people are asking because they have an interest. Tell me about this hope that you have. I am watching your life. I can see the way you live.
o I see your good behavior. You are a person of integrity. You don’t lie. You don’t cheat people. You don’t talk behind people’s back. You aren’t perfect, but there is something trustworthy and admirable in you.
o I see your hope. You have hard times, you have struggles. But I see you hanging onto something. Can you tell me what has made a difference in your life?
So it begins with compassion (not compulsion). The motive is to serve. It becomes attractive through demonstration. We serve with what we have and we give it freely to meet people’s needs.

As we do, the message becomes attractive. I love the way Jon Boseman put it last week. He told the story about speaking at a Pastor’s Meeting just before lunch. In the other room, they were backing fresh rolls. He said, everyone was smelling the aroma and wanting to be released for lunch.

When there is an odor it feeds the hunger for more.

He said, when there is fresh bread in a church or in a person’s life, there will be a natural hunger for more.

Now, if I ended the message right here—many of us would be happy with this approach. Have compassion. Seek to serve. Walk the walk. Be trustworthy and real. Pray for people as they have needs. People will ask when they see your life.

There is something that has to be added to compassion and demonstration. It is communication. There does come a point in time when you have to explain or express who Jesus is and what he did on the cross and how a person can get right with God.

Remember that Peter and John prayed for the man, out of compassion. They gave what they HAD with was healing power through the name of Jesus. And the man’s life was changed. He began to leap and jump and praise God. And many people smelling the fresh bread came running to see what was going on. And they asked...tell us what happened and how we can experience this hope as well.

And Peter stood up and declared the story of Jesus. You can read the message he gave right there in Jerusalem. Jesus died. He was crucified. But God raised Him up. He is God in the flesh. He came to take away our sin. He is the expression of God’s love to us. You can have life in Him.

Several thousand people responded to the message and were saved. Chapter four in Acts tells us the total number had reached 5000.

But not everyone was happy about this. Some will resist and reject the message not matter how real, or how much evidence there is, or how much compassion has been demonstrated. The religious leaders were disturbed by the declaration of Jesus. They brought Peter and John to confront them and to command them to not speak any longer in the name of Jesus.
This message was partly inspired by something I heard Andy Stanley speak about. He says, ‘it is ok with people if you talk about God most of the time. It’s ok to talk about spirituality. The problem comes in when you mention the person of Jesus. That’s when people get upset. Because of the claim that Jesus is God and that He is the only way back to God.’

This is what they declared to the religious leaders. We have to keep speaking of Jesus because…not Acts 4:12

*There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.*

Now, we are addressing the question, WHY FISH? Jesus wants us to be fishers of men…why? Why is this so important? Why is this necessary? Why do we have to do the third step here…communicate about Jesus. This is where it gets awkward. This is where we feel inadequate. So why?

The answer is this: Because the pathway to salvation and eternal life is not intuitive. It must be explained.

You can’t just be sincere enough and then you will understand. You can’t just go out and sit under a tree somewhere and meditate on God and have the pathway to salvation revealed to you. No matter how hurting you are, or how ready you are, or how sincere you are…you can’t understand the way to salvation, the path to eternal life unless someone explains it to you.

Why? Because Jesus is a historical figure. What he did he did in real life. He is not a philosophy. He is not a spiritual feeling. He is a real guy who did something very specific to make a way for us to get back to God.

He died for you. You won’t understand that unless someone tells you. His death can take away your sin. You can’t know that unless someone explains it to you.

He rose from the dead. Literally, came back to life. In history. He did this to show that he conquered death and that he can give us life.

He ascended to heaven. He is a living person today. He is capable of relationship with you.

This has to be explained. And how will people in your world know unless you find a way to tell them? That’s why Peter and John said, we can’t stop talking about the person of Jesus…even though it offends some, even though you don’t want us to, even though it is not always easy. Because there is no other name under heaven whereby you must be saved.
There comes a moment in time for communication. You have to ready to give the answer when someone asks or is ready to hear.

So what now?
1. Compassion – ask God to open your eyes to the needs of the people around you. Ask God to give you sensitive ears to listen to the pain of those you work with, go to school with, hang out with. Then seek to serve them. Do something to support, or pray for, or give to whatever their needs are...with no strings attached.
2. Demonstration – Consider what you HAVE. Think about the story you have to tell. Consider the skills you have or the stuff you have to give. Pray. Give God opportunities to show himself in people’s lives. Be trustworthy, kind, encouraging. St. Francis: preach the gospel at all times, if necessary—use words.
3. Communication – get ready to explain Jesus to people.

We will take some time in the next few weeks to talk about how to apply the last part. But just to prepare us for that, I have a homework assignment for you to do.

For those of you who have decided already to follow Christ. I want you to think back to that moment in time when you crossed over the line of faith and prayed the prayer to give your life to Jesus. Think about who the primary influence was in your life at that moment.

WRITE THEM A LETTER OF THANKS. Thank you for taking the time to explain the story of Jesus to me.

You don’t have to mail it. In fact, maybe the person has gone on to heaven already...write it any way. But you may want to mail it. Just to say thanks.

That will also help you to realize that you can be that person to make a difference in someone else’s life as well.

MY LETTER OF THANKS TO THOSE WHO LED ME TO JESUS:

Dear Mom and Dad:

The first person on my list to thank is you. When I was very young, you introduced to me the concept of God who loves me. You lived before me as great examples of Christ. You invested in me. You prayed for me. You took me to church.
It was there that I first remember walking forward after a service to give my life to Jesus Christ. I was probably only 4 or 5 years old. There was a children’s speaker that evening. He must have made the message clear to my young mind, for it was then that I first crossed the line of faith.

To that nameless speaker who gave the altar call that night...

I don’t even know who you are or what you said exactly. And you could never have imagined what it meant in the life of that 5 year old little boy when you invited us to walk forward to declare our faith.

I vividly remember clasping my mother’s hand and walking to the front. I remember the chills that went up and down my whole body as I confessed Jesus for the first time as my savior.

It set me on a course that has changed my life and eternity.

So thank you. Thanks for traveling to Monroeville. Thanks for giving your best to prepare that message. Thanks for making the message plain to a little boy. It has truly changed my life.

One final set of thanks...

To all the teachers, youth workers, and youth speakers who invested in me. You all built upon that foundation of a young boy’s commitment to Christ.

I do remember the name of the youth speaker at the youth camp when I was 15 years old. His name was Rick Olson. I was a struggling young person. I was unsure of my life and where I was headed. You challenged me to dedicate myself completely to Jesus.

You drew the line in the sand and I crossed over. I haven’t looked back since. Thanks for the challenge that day.

I owe you all so much.

Jeff
TESTIMONIES:

2) Ben Davis – he had a major ulcer / sore / abcessed tooth problem that wouldn’t go away...the doctors would drain it over and over again and it kept coming back...they said even if they removed the tooth it would keep coming back, they tried to medicate it and have him take different pills – no success...basically they told him he just had to deal with it...then recently, God was dealing with him about bitterness and unforgiveness towards his past church leaders and pastors and the problems he had there...he started to make that a major point of prayer everyday and eventually started walking in freedom towards them...all of a sudden, he noticed one day that his mouth was totally healed...I’m sure there might be some more details I could get from you if you wanted

3) Bob Trbusich – last Sunday (Feb 11) he came up to me for prayer. He was having major anxiety and panic attacks and couldn’t sleep through the night...this has been going on for a number of months. We prayed and this past week he slept straight through the night all 7 days of the week...he said that one of his co-workers made a comment to him that “he looks 10 years younger” – also this was a little bit of a bitterness issue, because he said that he’s had an “attitude” toward me for a while and he said that it was very important to him that he went up to me for prayer...that last part is a bit too personal and we might not want to share that...or else we could keep all the names anonymous

I just wanted to share with you the awesome thing that happened to me today. I have had this pain/tenderness in my stomach (kind of near my gall bladder on the right side) for over a year. The first time I had this checked out I was pregnant with my son Joshua. So only a sonogram and blood work could be done. Everything from those tests came back fine. Six months after Josh was born I was still having this tenderness in my stomach if pressure was applied in the same spot. So I went back to the doctor. He gave me medicine to try to see if it was gastritis, I had more blood work, and I had a HIDA scan done of my gall bladder yesterday (Saturday). This morning I went up with my husband, Geoff, to pray with Pastor Gregg...I told him what was going on and he had Geoff put his hand on my stomach and Pastor Gregg prayed. He asked if the pain was gone, and I said it was still there...he prayed AGAIN...the pain was completely gone! God is so good. I’m still in complete amazement...the whole service that was all I could think about and couldn’t wait to tell everyone!

Thank you Pastor Gregg for praying with me...