



## LET'S GO FISHING

By Rev. Will Nelken

---

*Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, CA, on Sunday, March 12, 2023*

*"Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." (Mark 1:17) Or, as another translation put it: "Follow Me, and I will show you how to fish for people."*

To "fish for people" means to evangelize, to preach the Gospel, to win the lost.

Pastors and evangelists, like fishermen everywhere, like to share their success stories. And they also like to debate about the best fishing method: attractional or missional?

Should we wait until people come to us, asking to be saved, or should we go to them, telling them about the Savior?

The debates are real, but the question is not. Fishing—whether for fish or for people—is *both* missional and attractional. The debates arise when either the mission or the attraction is no longer functioning effectively.

What is needed is to determine where the breakdown has occurred and improve that arena.

Have we lost our sense of mission? Look again to the original source. *"Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first"* (Revelation 2:5).

Have we grown lazy? *"Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary"* (Galatians 6:9).

Have we decided we don't need to catch fish ever again? Or do we prefer to let others do the work, and cheer them on?

Maybe our bait is outdated, and no longer effective; we just need some fresh bait. What are the fish natively eating these days? Could we increase the supply, or improve the selection?

Fishing is *not* an either/or process. Both mission and attraction are necessary.

## **The Mission**

Fishing requires intention. You must go where the fish are. You can't catch fish from your living room recliner. The hottest lure on the market won't catch fish from the street in front of my house. I'll have to drive to the lake, or the river, or the bay, or the ocean.

Driving to my chosen fishing spot is missional activity. I dress for the weather. I prepare hot coffee or cold drinks and a snack. I load my rods and other gear into my van and drive to the lake. Gear in hand, I walk along the shore to a spot I like. I set up my chair, I prepare my tackle. This is all missional activity, as long as my aim is to fish. (Sometimes, I like to go to the lake just to walk by the water, or to sit in the expansive silence. That's a mission of another kind.)

When I get to the lake where the fish are, I won't find them jumping onto the beach. I'll still have to catch them. That's where attractional methods come into play.

Some fishermen use nets, which they cast into the water. Then they drag the nets, sweeping up fish along the way. If you're in search of fish that swim in schools, that can be very productive; you just need to know where to find the schools (more missional activity).

## **The Attraction**

Some fishermen will use a method known as "chumming" to attract the schools of fish to the net. If you want to be a fish's "chum" or friend, just toss into the water their favorite food, and they may gather to where you are.

Attractional methods in the church world (and there are many) focus on enticing people to a location where they may hear the Good News presented. Interesting persons, interesting topics, dramas, films, music, food, contests, and prizes—these are common methods of gathering a crowd.

Announcing their presence with a building and a sign, and promoting some attraction like those just mentioned, is how many churches evangelize their community. Attractional.

If the attraction is effective, you must still cast the net—or else it's just a show. A net is best handled by multiple people, pulling at once from several angles. This spreads the net more widely and increases the likelihood of a large catch. But some people can handle a net by themselves. That's better than nothing.

Some fishermen are lone anglers—and they prefer to use a hook, instead of a net. Unless you're dragging a line with one or more hooks through a school of fish, hoping to snag one or two, you'll have to use a variation of the chumming method—you'll have to bait the hook.

Bait is attractive. And if you bury a hook in the bait, there's a good chance you'll bring home a fish that was hungry.

## **Skillful Passion**

Whether nets or hooks, there are a variety of skills to develop that can increase the results of your efforts. Knot tying, baiting the hook, casting the bait, setting the hook when a fish bites, reeling in the line (fighting the fish)—these and many other skills are needed.

What will happen if you neglect the skills? Happenstance. Always fishing, seldom catching. Discouragement. Losing the passion.

So also with evangelism (fishing for people). If you don't have a passion to see other people discover eternal life through a faith relationship with Jesus Christ, either you've never found that for yourself, or you've not developed the skills to help them.

If church life is simply a religious routine for you, and not a driving passion of worship and love, please consider inviting Jesus into your heart, the core of your life, to forgive your sins and lead you into a deeply meaningful and fruitful life. Living on the fringe will not satisfy you for long. It's not supposed to.

With Jesus alive in the center of your life, you'll have a passion to tell others about Him, but you'll still need to develop skills.

Some skills are aimed at improving your own inward connection to Christ, and your missional passion—like prayer, Bible reading, and worship. No one else can do these things for you. If you don't give yourself to them, they just won't happen. And if they don't happen, your inner flame will die out.

Other skills aim at improving your outward representation of Christ, which is what others find attractive—like intercession, Bible study, and telling others of your faith. Let me be clear: the attractiveness I refer to is not your personal attractiveness (*"Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses"* 1 Peter 3:3), but the natural attractiveness of Jesus, *clearly shining through you* (*"But let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God"* 1 Peter 3:4).

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Fishing for people happens most where you are already going, from day to day. You can turn your everyday activities into missional activities by prayerfully looking for open doors and listening for conversational hooks that you can follow with your testimony and the Good News message about Jesus. Only through such entry points will your attractational efforts show their effectiveness.

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