

Do you know how to catch more fish? Seriously, if you know, tell me. I'm no fishing expert, that's for sure. But I do know that the more lines you have in the water, the better chance you'll catch something. Fishing requires patience. Hours can go by with nothing. The reasons are many; wrong bait, wrong time, wrong presentation, or a million others. Be prepared for a lot of failure.

Believe it or not, the third component of the mission vision statement for our congregation involves a lot of failure too. Like fishing, it can get us down. Failure stacks up against us and makes us want to give up. Makes us question whether we should do it. Why throw lines in the water, so to speak, if nothing is biting? Why get involved if it only ends in failure?

There's no question that this third component is a challenging one, but it's not all failure. It matches up with fishing in that there is always a fisherman, the bait, and the catch. It also seems more challenging because you are more directly involved. That's challenging because you want growth without the feeling of failure. God doesn't promise no failure, but he does make us a special promise in the first lesson from Isaiah. He says that we'll...

Increase by scattering through outreach

A couple of the disciples Jesus called were fishermen. They made money by fishing. But Jesus wasn't interested in their fishing skills. He would make them fishers of men, people who fished for people so to speak. But they weren't specifically trained to go after human beings in outreach. Certainly Jesus could've found people better trained for that work. But Jesus didn't want them, he wanted who he picked. Now look around. Look at me. Jesus is still fishing for people. He needs fishermen. Who's going to do that? Jesus calls each of us. You too are being selected to scatter into the world and do the work of outreach. "But there's people better trained with more time. There are people with more personality, charisma, and better speaking abilities." Jesus doesn't want those, he wants you. By being a Christian, this is your work too. You're a fisherman doing outreach.

Let's address it right away. Deep down you probably wish Jesus picked someone else. But why? I suppose it's because talking about religion is risky. People have deep religious feelings and it's risky to tell them Jesus is the only way to be saved. I suppose there are a lot of questions people could ask where you might not have answers. You would feel foolish if you were confronted with a question you couldn't answer about Jesus. I suppose there's also that the person could simply reject you. Failure is one of the biggest fears we have. When it comes to sharing Jesus, the fear of failure is probably our biggest fear. So we pretend we're not fishermen. We shy away from contact. We don't say what we know needs to be said.

Fishermen for the Lord, cheer up! Christ Jesus, the great fishermen, has a promise. **"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."** Jesus says through Isaiah that we have no need to be surprised he picked us to participate in outreach. We don't have to fear the risk, the confrontation, or the questions. God's ways are higher than our ways and he picked us to be fishermen doing outreach. He picked us because he works through us, our words, and our friendships. You're a success already because you were caught by Jesus through his love. **"Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced..."** Paul said to the Corinthians. That love, God's love in Christ, which is much higher than us, that is what compels us to be fishermen and do outreach.

Fish don't bite on empty hooks, but they'll bite on almost any other bait. The biggest question while fishing, which one? Fish bite on different baits at different times. That's partly why fishing isn't always successful. Fishing for the Lord what will you use as bait? You could try and outsmart someone into believing using your intellect. You could show them all the historical data revealing connections to Jesus. You could throw out a lot of bait, but nothing will have the potential for success like God's Word. **"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth."** God's Word is like the rain; it comes down and works. God's Word is foolproof bait and the only bait we have to put before people.

So you get up the courage to talk to someone at work over coffee about Jesus. Solid back and forth talk about Jesus. No results. Next day at lunch, still nothing. With your confidence up you try more, talking in the halls, right after work. You invite them to church. You share a Bible passage or two. Still no response. What gives? God's Word was supposed to work. Or you compare our church with other churches around of friends you know. Ours isn't growing but theirs is. We've got programs that focus on God's Word, people dedicated to God's Word, preaching and teaching that centers in God's Word. Still no growth. What gives? God's Word was supposed to work. That's the bait God wants us to use but it doesn't always work. Fishermen try different baits after awhile. We get to thinking maybe we need something better.

Fishermen for the Lord, you don't need better bait! The message about Jesus is the only bait we need. **"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them."** The message of forgiveness in Christ is bait that makes people bite. **"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."** The message that Christ became our substitute and Savior makes people bite. That's the bait you need and it's all over the Bible. How do we know it works as fishermen looking to do outreach? Simply look at how God caught you; God's Word was the bait you took wasn't it?

Someone catching their first fish is usually a thrill. Everything worked right. The fisherman was in the right place, the bait was in front of the fish at the right time, the fish bit and was caught. But when there's no catch it can feel deflating. But how much does the fisherman control? Being in a spot. Putting a bait out. Lots of waiting. That's it. That's not a guarantee for a catch. Don't let outreach surprise you with its lack of success. You talking to a person who needs to hear about Jesus is absolutely the right spot. You having some thoughts about Jesus ready to share is absolutely the right bait. The catch, whether that person believes what you say or not belongs to the Lord.

Fishing stories are all about bragging. I caught this huge fish. I had the right lure. I worked the bait just the right way. I fought and finally brought that whopper into the boat. We love taking credit when things go right. So in outreach, if we find success it must have been partly us. My personality, my time, my money, my prayers. But when failure happens we hesitate, we think twice, and we wonder if this fishing business is all worth it. And when failure happens a lot it leads to impatience, grumpiness, and finally disregard for the work of outreach. Are you there? Are you impatient with how many members we're losing or not getting? Are you grumpy that any hard work you've shown in VBS or Fall Family Festival hasn't resulted in anything? Are you questioning whether or not being involved in outreach is worth it? That's where disappointment turns to sin.

Fishermen for the Lord, the catch belongs to the Lord! The word that goes out from his mouth, **"will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."** The accomplishments are the Lord's. The purposes are the Lord's. The sending in the first place is the Lord's. You get no credit for the catch and no blame for the rejection. Throw as many lines in as you can because all that's caught will belong to the Lord. In outreach you can't fail.

Outreach is a part of our mission and vision. We're fishermen for the Lord and, **"from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view."** Everyone is someone who needs to hear about Jesus, and as a Christian that's what we do. We talk about our Savior. It's not complicated. It simply happens because we were caught by Christ too. Tell others Jesus came to save sinners. Tell others he lived, died, and rose from the dead. Tell them he forgives sins. We're fishermen for the Lord. We've got the bait in his word of forgiveness from the Bible. We've got his promises that successful catches belong to him. Friends, outreach is all God's work done through us. Now increase his kingdom by scattering his Word to find his catch through outreach.