

Fulfilling God's Will For His Church

[Part 6]

Every Christian and every church is in the fishing business.

Matthew 4:19 [Living Bible] *“Jesus called out, come along with me and I will show you how to **fish** for the souls of men.”*

1 Corinthians 9:22 [Living Bible] *“What ever a person is like, I try to **find common ground** with him so that he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him.”*

The secret of being a good fisherman is to understand fish; you figure out:-

- a) where the fish are;
- b) what time of day they liked to eat;
- c) the best bait or lure to use depending on type of fish;
- d) when to change bait as the temperature changes.

You only catch fish on their terms.

Jesus gave us not only what to say but how to share this message.

Jesus gave us timeless principles of evangelism, that still work today if we apply them.

Matthew 10:5-16 [NIV] *“These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: **“Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.** As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep. “Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town. I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”*

Fulfilling the needs of a targeted group of people.

Luke 10:1-16 [NIV] *“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. “When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. “When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God is near you.’ But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and*

Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."

Only persist with those who respond favourably.

These two passages indicate *"five fishing guidelines for evangelism."*

1 Know what you are fishing for – target your audience.

Each type of fish needs a different strategy, equipment, bait and timing if it is to be caught.

When Jesus sent out His disciples He defined their target very specifically.

Matthew 10:5-6 [NIV] *"These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel."*

Such targeting is to be effective.

People who were most like the disciples themselves so could easily relate to them.

2 Go where the fish are biting – target the needs of the people.

This principle of receptivity was explained in last article.

This receptivity often lasts only briefly, so go where such people are.

Matthew 10:14-15 [NIV] *"If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town."*

Jesus told the disciples not to stay around unresponsive people trying to reach them; future events in their lives will make them receptive in the future.

The apostle Paul's strategy was to go through open doors and not waste time banging on closed doors.

I believe the Holy Spirit wants to direct us to people He has already prepared to respond.

Matthew 9:35-38 [NIV] *"Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."*

There are far more people who are ready to receive Christ than there are believers ready and willing to go out into community to reach them.

3 Learn to think like a fish

In order to catch fish you need to know their habits, preferences and feeding patterns.

Jesus often knew what unbelievers were thinking. I do not think this was supernatural, very often you can *"read"* a person's thoughts on their face or in their *"body language"*.

The more we listen to people the more we can read their thoughts and needs; Christ was a constructive listener.

[See Matthew 9:4; 12:25; Mark 2:8; Luke 5:22; 9:47; 11:17]

Colossians 4:5-6 [NIV] *“Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”*

We must learn to think like unbelievers in order to win them.

The problem is the longer we are a believer, the less we think like an unbeliever, our interests and our values change.

All church advertising must be written from the mind-set of an unchurched person; we need to tune into their wavelength to be heard by them.

How do we do this?

Talk to them, and listen to them constructively.

Listening to the Unchurched

*“They have rejected the institution, **not** God, and we can learn from their concerns.”*

One of the distinguishing characteristics of effective churches in the 21st century is that they place a high priority on reaching unchurched people and frequently invest time and energy in *“asking the customer.”*

They conduct interviews, focus groups, and surveys that ask unchurched people in their community why they are unchurched.

Mecklenburg Community Church, near Charlotte, North Carolina, was begun in October 1992. The church presently holds its three Sunday services in an elementary school until permanent facilities are secured. Of the more than 700 members, 80% were formerly unchurched and 50% became members through initial faith in Jesus Christ. Prior to the public beginning of the church, a survey of the area’s unchurched population was conducted by the Barna Research Group. The survey posed a fundamental question: *“Why don’t you go to church?”* The major results of the survey are as follows and used in NetFax with the permission of Dr. James Emery White, the church’s senior minister.

1. **“There is no value in attending.”** (74%) The unchurched felt like they could connect with God as easily, if not better, on the golf course as they could in a worship service. While interested in spiritual things, the unchurched do not feel that church has much to offer their spiritual pilgrimage. This verdict would be similar to McDonald’s discovering that people wanted hamburgers but didn’t think that McDonald’s was a place to get one.
2. **“Churches have too many problems.”** (81%) The reputation of the church among the unchurched is in shambles. It is believed that churches are inflexible, hypocritical, judgmental, and just plain mean. One man in the survey said, *“I have enough problems in my life. Why would I go to church and get more?”*
3. **“I don’t have the time.”** (48%) Time has replaced money as the new currency in contemporary American society. Rather than asking *“how much does this cost?”* people are prone to ask *“how long will this take?”* Sundays are, for many, the only day to *“play.”*
4. **“I’m simply not interested.”** (42%) A rather large number of people are simply not interested, for one reason or another, in attending church.
5. **“Churches ask for money too much.”** (40%) Many feel that churches seem more interested in their wallets than in them as people.

6 and 7. **“Church services are usually boring (36%) and irrelevant to the way I live.”** (34%) The verdict of the unchurched is that most services are boring and lifeless, with sermons that are irrelevant to life in the real world.

8. **“I don’t believe in God, or I am unsure that God exists.”** (12%) Many feel that the unchurched have rejected faith or God. In reality, they have rejected the church.

Matthew 10:16 [NIV] *“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”*

We need to anticipate and answer in our minds all the objections unbelievers will have before they voice them. (See our article ‘10 Objections To Christianity And How To Respond’ – found under ‘Evangelism’)

It means learning to think like an unbeliever.

4 A good fisherman uses all he knows about a fish and its habits to catch it

What we find out by the survey may **not** be what we expect, but God will guide us in making the right decisions if we truly do wish to be fishers of men.

John 21:3-6 [NIV] *“I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus. He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” “No,” they answered. He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.”*

Without God’s guidance His disciples were fishing in the wrong place, not where God had prepared fish to be caught.

Note: In spite of the miraculous help, it took a great deal of physical labour on the disciples to land the fish.

We have to go fishing to catch fish

Serious fishermen will go to any length to catch fish.

How serious are you and I about the commission given to the church?

Are we willing to go to any length, and move out of our “comfort zone” to win people for Christ?

Too often we let culture differences between believers and unbelievers become barriers to getting the Good News proclaimed effectively.

For some Christians, any talk of “*adapting to the culture of the unbeliever*” sounds like liberalism.

This is **not** a new fear.

Acts 15:1-11 [NIV] *“Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. The church sent them on their way, and as they travelled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them. Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, “The Gentiles must be circumcised and*

required to obey the law of Moses.” The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: “Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

This crisis counsel was a result of Paul’s resistance to what could be a painful barrier to Gentiles [those without God] coming into the Christian church.

The gospel message to be effective must be communicated in the terms of a culture; we need to be aware of what culture is predominant in our own church area.

5 Put the best bait on our hook

Every different fish is most likely to be caught if we fish with the right size hook and bait for that fish.

We need to let our target determine our approach.

1 Corinthians 9:22-23 [Living Bible] “Yes, whatever a person is like, I try to find common ground with him so that he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him. I do this to get the gospel to them and also for the blessing I myself receive when I see them come to Christ.”

Fitting the right bait is the same as to beginning with the felt needs of the people in each church community.

Their hurts, need and interests.

Matthew 10:8 [NIV] “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”

Notice the total emphasis on the needs and hurts.

When you are in pain, physical or emotional, your only interest is getting relief.

If we are as a church really serious about reaching the unchurched, we must be willing to deal with people who have a lot of problems.

Fishing is often messy and smelly.

If we only want to deal with fish that are already scaled, gutted, cleaned and cooked, we will never catch any.

6 Understand and respond to the hang-ups of the unchurched.

Even when these hang-ups are based on ignorance.

Example hang-ups:-

- a) churches only after their money
- b) churches using guilt or fear to motivate members
- c) members expected to attend every meeting held
- d) visitors made to stand up and introduce themselves

- e) denominational labels sometimes carry a lot of negative baggage due to press exposure of the mis-deeds of some of their leaders

We have two options with this last hang-up

- a) spend years to educate the community about the real Church before we get them to visit our meetings
- b) reach out to them as a local community church and then clear up any misconceptions about church denomination **after** they accept Christ

I feel the second option is the most effective, although I know I will face a lot of criticism for this choice.

I don't want anything to be a barrier between me reaching the unchurched for Christ.

Few unchurched people choose a church because of its denominational label nowadays.

They mostly choose the church they feel will best minister to their needs.

7 Use more than one hook and change bait if the one used doesn't work

In the age of multi-channel television and supermarkets, people are offered more options than ever before.

All these options are then well advertised in a most attractive way possible.

Cheap looking, un-targeted "tracts" will not bring people through the church doors.

Our goal must be to make it as easy as possible for the unchurched to hear about Christ.

Why do churches fish with only one hook and one kind of bait?

Why do we have few or no outreach programmes?

I feel this is because we ask the wrong question when it comes to outreach.

Too often the first question asked is, 'How much will it cost?'

The right question is, 'Who will it reach?'

Luke 14:25-35 [NIV] *"Large crowds were travelling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure heap; it is thrown out. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

Discipleship is a total surrender to Christ and His work.

To reach the community around our church meeting place will cost money and time.

But let us remember a few things about God's work:

- a) God's work done God's way will **not** lack God's support;
- b) Money spent on evangelism is **never** an expense.

It is always an investment.

The support from the people we reach will always out-weigh the cost you invested to reach them;

- c) Realise that people are more likely to give support to a clearly defined mission than to a need.

Churches that are making the most of the gifts that God has given to the individuals in that church attract more people and gifts.

Luke 19:26 [NIV] *"He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away.'"*

Those who made full use of what was given them by God received more to accomplish more;

- d) The cost of the fishing is found in the mouths of the fish.

Matthew 17:27 [NIV] *"But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours."*

I believe this is an important lesson for us all to learn.

If we focus on fishing [evangelism] God will pay the cost.

Conclusion: The men to whom Christ first said *"I will make you fishers of men"* were professionals and their life depended on fishing.

For a Christian, fishing for unbelievers should not be a hobby but also our lifestyle, for I feel the scripture shows that our future eternal life depends on how serious we take the Great Commission Jesus the Christ has given us all.