

FISHERS OF MEN: What Most Churches and Christians Do Not Understand

By Bob Young

Most churches struggle with evangelism -- how to effectively share the gospel to reach the lost. Churches jump from one program to the next. Churches hire staff members whose focus is on outreach. Churches multiply staff members, leaving many Christians with the impression that they can hire someone to fish for them.

Many Christians today do not have a personal view of evangelism. Many do not have a positive view of evangelism. Evangelism is for a professional on a platform, or for church leaders, or for specially gifted Christians, or for those who are called. Many Christians are fearful when it comes to evangelizing.

Many Christians are happy someone shared the gospel with them but fearful of doing the same. On the other hand, newly baptized believers rejoice to hear the Good News and immediately want to tell others. They live in a brand-new world and they are excited about new life in Christ. They want to share even though they do not have all the answers clearly in mind.

This contrast suggests that a great challenge before the church is helping those who have been Christians for a long time adopt a new paradigm with a lifestyle of relational evangelism. The Bible uses the Greek word OIKOS to describe one's close circle of family and friends. New Christians easily recognize that they are surrounded with an OIKOS of lost friends and family. How can that truth permeate the church? How can the church find success again in evangelizing?

One problem is that we have a contemporary view of fishing. We read the Bible and think of a solitary angler trying to catch a fish. First century fishing was not done with a rod and line. First century fishing was done with a net. What would happen if your church learned how to fish with a net? What would that look like?

Net evangelism involves bringing as many fish as possible to the boat. The sorting occurs later. Too often the church goes out among the fish and tries to identify and sort the fish in the water rather than bringing a netful into the boat or onto the shore. Net fishing requires casting the net broadly and drawing in many fish.

This truth is reflected in numerous New Testament passages. In Jesus' parable of the wedding feast, the servant was told to go out and bring them in. Philip's words to Nathanael were "come and see." In the early chapters of Acts, the community was attracted to the believers when they saw those believers living life together. The New Testament church assembles in order to go out together and live out together what it means to be God's people.

An effective tool that I have used for modern-day net-fishing is for the church to host at least one "come and see" event each month. These events are designed to be relational and spiritually-focused – to touch life in problem points. This kind of net-fishing facilitates outreach—bringing believers together in contexts where life can be shared with others. This kind of net-fishing is something the church does together—and praying for the lives that are touched is a natural part of the gatherings. This kind of net-fishing is not all work and no play—the best events provide a variety of interaction possibilities. When new believers are brought to Jesus, there is already an automatic support group available for discipling and maturing.

This strategy only works if members help with the fishing. Members must invite, attract, and bring others. God works when we seek to interact with others in the name of Jesus. Evangelism at its best involves the entire body with all its varied gifts.

I believe net evangelism could cause Christians to become excited about the "E" word so it will become a natural part of their walk with Christ. It will also help them move into deeper relationship with other Christians because all are partnering to fulfill the Great Commission—a task God loves to bless!