

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtminc.org Today's Date: February 26, 2023

There's More: Learning to Become Fishers of People

by Dan Trygg

“Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. ¹⁹ And He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of people.’ ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.”

Matthew 4:18-20

“...from now on you will be catching people.”

Luke 5:10

“I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine (lit., ‘healthy teaching’); but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to unreliable-stories. ⁵ But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

2 Timothy 4:1-5

We are first introduced to Jesus’ disciples in the gospel of Matthew in the fourth chapter, verse eighteen. All we are told is that He was walking along the seashore, and He saw the two brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew, casting a net, because they were fishermen. He called out to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of people.” This seems very abrupt, and we are surprised to see their reaction, “They immediately left their nets, and followed Him.” When we read the gospel of John, however, we discover that these brothers, and the other brothers just down the beach, Zeb’s boys, had already been following Jesus for some time, possibly as long as a year! Their level of involvement, however, was mostly as people attending Jesus’ meetings, and spending time with Him. They were also assisting in the ministry, helping to baptize the people who were responding to Jesus’ preaching. They were like “groupies”. But, their involvement was off and on, because they were still working as fishermen. Jesus was calling them to a deeper level of commitment and training. Specifically, He was inviting them to learn how to “fish for people”.

In some ways, these guys could have had a fairly realistic idea of what that may entail, if they had thought about it. After all, they didn’t buy *their* fish from the store, or a restaurant. They *labored* for their fish! They had applied themselves to become very proficient at their craft. They knew how to catch them one at a time (Matt. 17:27), and how to cast a net to catch boatloads of fish (Lk. 5:1-11), ...at least that was their dream, *before* they met Jesus. They knew it required a lot of work. Hard, exhausting, sweaty work, sometimes. They worked at odd hours, sometimes all night. They had to adjust to what they were trying to “catch”. There was no “one size fits all” approach to successful fishing. Even the weather was a factor. Fish go through phases, times when they are hungry and times when they are not. You need to learn to fish when the fishing is good, ...or find a way to get their attention. And, it seemed like they were always in “maintaining mode”, having to wash and repair equipment, clean up after themselves, and make preparations to stock up, etc., so they’d be ready for the next trip out.

Jesus was going to teach these guys how those principles applied to working with people. Jesus went to the people. He spent time with them. He was personal, positive, even entertaining, but His talks always pointed back to God, and making a life decision. His style of ministry took the “fishing” to the people. He didn’t just rent a big hall, and try to get people to come to where He was. He walked their streets, went to the marketplace and their homes, talked in their local synagogues. He shared meals with people, even hobnobbing with some who were of questionable reputation. He spent long days, and talked even into the night with some. He looked for those who were needy, ...those who were hungry for a good word from God, even if they didn’t *know* that’s what they needed. Jesus and His men arranged their lives around their fishing expeditions. Then, just as in their fishing business, they had to sort out what they caught. Some were ready and eager to learn and grow, while others had a different agenda. The goal of fishing is *not* just to “catch stuff”, ...not even to just catch fish. The goal is to catch the fish that are “keepers” (Matt. 13:47-50). Jesus was not after an emotional response, a big crowd, or “decisions”. He was looking for, ...and taught His trainees to look for..., those who were serious about following Him, those who would become active followers and trainees in their own right. Jesus had no problem walking away from a big crowd, if He sensed it was not going to be productive.

If we are going to “catch people”, we also will need to *adjust ourselves*. We must be willing to go to them, on their turf, somehow. We need to present ourselves in an acceptable, appropriate way for those we are seeking to reach. The apostle Paul spoke of this in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, “For though I am free from all people, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the

Law; ²¹ to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. ²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all people, so that by any means I might save some.” **So often, religious people come across in ways that are a turn-off to those they are hoping to reach.** If we come to them with strange clothing, or with mannerisms and speech that are full of religious trappings, many will be confused or will reject us, simply because our appearance, way of talking and behaving seem strange or uncomfortable. ***The first rule of using “bait” is that it has to look natural. It can’t be weird or strange. It needs to look like it belongs.*** People who are fly fisherpeople are careful to see what the fish are feeding on, and adjust what lure they use to appear like what the fish are currently feeding on. The same is true for dealing with people. Something that feels or looks artificial, “canned”, or strange causes people to put their defenses up, or to avoid contact. They feel manipulated or “set up”.

The second rule of using “bait” is that it has to look and taste GOOD! We must have a positive attitude and a good message. **It’s the GOOD news, remember? Jesus said that people will know we are His followers by our love, so I guess that should be how people first get to know us.** So many religious people turn others off by their legalism, judgmentalism and negativity. **Who in their right mind would want to join the “pious prude club”, or the “political extremist group” (from their point of view), or the “God-talkers”, or the “anti-science people”, the “holier-than-thou bunch”, or the “health and wealth grifters”?** Whatever little bits of truth there may be in any of these categorizations will be overpowered by the “bad taste” that some of the excesses exude. **Most people are turned off by the “stink” that comes from such people. They don’t smell the fragrance of Christ, ...they smell something else, and it isn’t good!**

By the way, Jesus’ whole life was a demonstration of these two principles. The eternal Word was birthed into this world as a human being, so that He could live among us. **He appeared like a regular guy.** The scriptures say that there was nothing about His appearance that was attractive (Isa. 53:2). But there was also nothing about His appearance or manner that was offensive, either, ...except to the hyper-religious and those who were suspicious of His popularity. **He totally blended in with the everyday people, ...and He was accepting, gracious and kind.** He did not compromise truth, or the law, but **He spoke, demonstrated and presented a positive message of God’s love. He was GOOD NEWS!** The radiance that came from His life and message was “grace and truth”.

What did He preach about? He spoke of needs, then offered a solution to meet those needs. To the woman at the well, He talked about living water, and how He could give her something that would satisfy the thirst of her heart (Jn. 4:10-14). To the harassed and weary masses, He offered care and protection for those who would follow Him. To those who had been burdened down with religious legalism, He offered a different way to know and serve God, ...a way that was “light” and manageable..., and a “yoke” of discipleship where He Himself would walk beside them to help and train them (Matt. 11:28-30). **He met practical and physical needs, but always called people to acknowledge God as their King. Grace was offered to them as a gift to be received, so that their lives could change. They did not have to “fix” their lives first, to become acceptable to God, ...just yield to Him as King and follow Him from where they were in life.** The “good news of the kingdom of God” was that they could start fresh with Him by confessing their sin, and consecrating themselves through faith. The people who were attracted most to this “fresh start” were those who *knew they were sinners*, or those who *were motivated to make a deeper commitment*. Even to the seeking Pharisee, a man who had devoted his entire life to keeping the law and religious traditions, **Jesus offered an entirely different way of living, receiving the birth of a new life from above.** This life was not earned by religious performances, but can be received by simple faith by those who look to Jesus with expectation (Jn. 3:1-15).

Jesus always preached for a response. There is the need to draw people to make a commitment, a choice to live for God. This would be like “setting the hook” or “drawing in the net” in the fisher of people analogy. If we don’t push people to make a decision, it is like they are nibbling at the bait, tasting its good flavor, licking the outside of what seems to be what they want, but they never really grab on and go for it. **There are many “wannabees” and “almost did’s” when it comes to Jesus.** There are many who have come really close to making a commitment, but then just shy away. Some even *thought that they did*, because they hung around with church people. They felt comfortable among the fellowship of believers, but *they themselves have never really made a clear, strong commitment for Christ*. Their allegiance is *not* to Him. **They are driving the bus of their own lives. They are not looking to Jesus for direction, purpose, mission or fulfillment.** He is like window dressing in their religious imagination. **We need to talk clearly and plainly about discipleship.** We are not here to get attenders, or to enlarge our membership. **Our purpose is to find those who are willing to commit to Christ as their King, and will choose to follow Him along the apprenticeship pathway.** The church is not a place for spectators or wannabees. It is a place to be trained in the skills of being a disciple of Jesus Christ, ...*all* of the skills. **If you are going to follow JESUS, He is going to bring you the whole way. You will be taught to do “all that He said” (Matt. 28:20). This is where we sort out the “keepers.”** It doesn’t take long to see who is serious, and who isn’t. **We are to help the serious grow, mature, and become activated in their faith.**