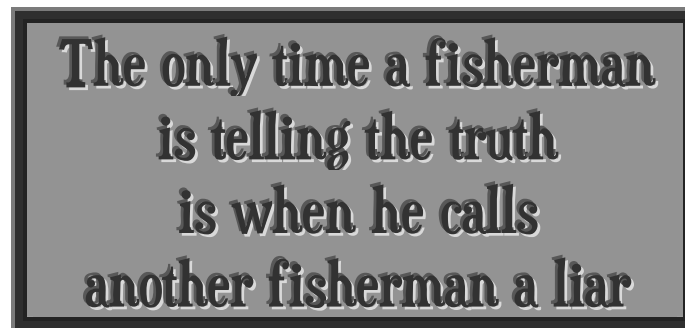


INTRODUCTION

Welcome to GSPN! Actually, this is GSPN2, because this is the second message in the series. You've heard of ESPN and ESPN2, but you may not know what GSPN is. It stands for God's Spiritual Playmaker Network. Only a few players in sports can be real playmakers, but *every* child of God can become a Spiritual Playmaker. A sports playmaker can make a difference in the outcome of a game, but a Spiritual Playmaker can make a difference in eternity! Today I'm talking about fishing, the next message in this series will focus on golf and the title will be "Keep it in the Fairway." Then two weeks from today we'll conclude the series on Kick-Off Sunday as I talk about "It's All About Reaching the Goal."

Fishermen have a reputation for stretching the truth. I had a guy tell me once that he caught a fish so big that the picture weighed 15 pounds! There was a sign in a barbershop I used to visit that said:



Bubba and Billy Bob were bragging one day about their fishing exploits. Bubba said, "You wouldn't believe it! I hooked a bass the other day that was so big it pulled the boat around the lake before I could land it. When I finally caught it, it was over four feet long!" Billy Bob said, "That's nothing, I was bottom fishing the other night and I hooked something heavy, and when I pulled it in, it was a Coleman Lantern somebody had dropped overboard, and believe it or not, that lantern was still burning!" Bubba said, "Tell you what, I'll take three feet off my bass if you'll blow out that lantern." Billy Bob said, "Deal!"

When I was a kid I did a lot of fishing with my dad. Many Saturday mornings he'd get me up early, and I was so excited I could hardly sleep. I started fishing with a cane pole and a cork, but I can remember my dad teaching me how to fish with a rod and reel, because that was real fishing (no pun)! I'll never forget the first time I hooked a fish on my Zebco rod and reel, when I landed that whopper, it probably weighed all of a pound, but I was so excited! I looked at my dad and I didn't understand then why he had tears in his eyes...but since I've become I dad, I understand now.

It's interesting that the first disciples Jesus called were fishermen. In Luke 5, there's a great story about Jesus fishing. It was early in Jesus' ministry, but the crowds were already becoming unmanageable. One morning Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, which is actually a large fresh water lake seven miles wide and thirteen miles long. He found a group of fishermen

tending their nets after fishing all night. Jesus asked them if he could use one of their boats. They agreed, so Jesus stood in the boat and pushed it a little way from shore and began to teach the crowds lining the shore. After Jesus finished, the crowd dispersed and Jesus said to Peter, "Did you catch any fish last night?"

I've always pictured Peter as a big, burly, outdoorsman: The original redneck. I imagine if Peter lived today he'd drive a pickup with big, oversized tires with a rifle rack in the window and a bumper sticker that reads, "God, guts, and guns made America great." Can't you see the bleary-eyed fisherman sitting on a log that morning tending to his nets? You might say he was logged onto his network. Peter growled, "Nope. Fished all night and got skunked." Jesus said, "Why don't you go out a little deeper and try again?"

I imagine Peter rolled his eyes as he thought, "Why does this landlubber rabbi think he knows anything about fishing? I've been fishing all my life and I know that fish stay near the shore where there's food for them. I ain't never caught no fish in deep water." But there was something about Jesus that fascinated Peter, so he said, "If you say so. Hey guys, let's give it another try out in *deep water* this time." Can you hear the grumbling from the other guys because they were tired and only wanted breakfast and bed?

Luke 5:6-11. "When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.' So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him."

Jesus loved fishing and fishermen. From this story we see Jesus knew more about fishing than Peter did, because Jesus created the fish! He knows all there is to know about fishing for people, too, because He created people as well. There are some similarities in fishing for fish and men. If you want to be effective at fishing, here are five fishing tips from the Master:

TIP #1: USE THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

I've heard there are some people in Kentucky and Tennessee who get in the water and reach under a dark riverbank to catch huge catfish with their hands. There's a word for that: STUPIDITY! (Noodling, actually) You can do that, but the best way to catch fish is to use the proper fishing equipment. If you're going to fish for bream, you don't need a big hook. But if you're fishing for sharks, don't use a tiny hook either. It's all about having the right equipment.

When God calls you, He equips you with every resource you need to be an effective fisher of people. Someone said, "God doesn't call those who are equipped, He equips those He calls." Here's our equipment list:

(1) The LURE is the message of Jesus Christ

Some people say, "I don't have to talk about Jesus, I'll just let my life be an example to others." That's nice, but you're using the wrong bait! The purpose of a fishing lure is to attract the fish. In a word full of sinful and dying people, the message of forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus is the most attractive truth you can find.

Sometimes people think they have to change the gospel to make it more attractive to non-Christians. You don't have to do anything to make the gospel more attractive. Let's see, I traded all my guilt for a full pardon; I exchanged my misery for His joy; I swapped an eternity in hell for an eternity in heaven...hmm, can it get any *more* attractive than that?

(2) The HOOK is the conviction of the Holy Spirit

We can share the gospel, but a person can't receive Christ until they realize they *need* Christ. They need to admit they are sinners. There is a brand of easy believism going around today that says we don't have to tell people about sin or hell, let's just show them how *nice* it is to be a Christian. That would be like fishing with a lure with no hooks. We don't have to bombard people with the truth of their sinfulness—most of them already know it. Jesus said in John 16:8 that the Holy Spirit will "convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement." Too many preachers try to usurp the role of the Holy Spirit. Scary stories may bring fears, and sad stories may bring tears, but only the Spirit of God can bring true conviction of sin.

(3) The REEL is the will of God the Father

When a person is hooked, we don't even have to reel them in, God does that. There is usually some kind of resistance, but God reels them in. If you are a Christian, the only way you came to saving faith in Jesus was through the loving pull of the Father. Jesus said: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." (John 6:44) So what's our job? That's tip #2.

TIP #2: GO WHERE THE FISH ARE

If you're going fishing, you won't catch fish unless you leave your pew or leave your house. I heard about a lady who went to see a psychiatrist and said, "Doctor, my husband fishes everyday in our bathtub!" The psychiatrist said, "Well, just tell him to stop." She replied, "I'd like to, but we really need the fish!" You can't catch fish in a bathtub or a swimming pool. You have to go to where the fish are.

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to go fishing with Jay Yelas on Lake Tyler. It was pretty embarrassing. I haven't done much fishing since I traded my rod and reels for golf clubs about 20 years ago, but I still enjoy going when I can. As we cast, I was amazed at how accurate Jay was with his casts. We were fishing near some boat docks and he could toss his lure through six or seven dock posts right to his intended target. The fish really weren't biting that day, but Jay still managed to land a few. Toward the end of the day, I snagged something really heavy—I just knew it was a whopper. As I finally reeled it close to the boat, Jay stood there with a net. Finally I got it to the top and it was a huge...turtle. When I had cast my lure, at the moment it hit the water, this poor turtle was surfacing and I hooked him on the shell behind his neck. The turtle

wasn't happy—and neither was I. Jay did a good job of stifling his amusement for a few seconds, and then he burst out laughing. He said, "Pastor, if I ever hear there's a pro tour for turtle catching, I'll give you a call!"

Jay Yelas will tell you once you get on a lake, then you have to know where the fish are and go to them before you can be successful. Where are the people you need to catch for Jesus? They are in your neighborhood, your office, your school. That's where you ought to be doing your fishing.

It's pretty rare for a stranger without Christ to wander into a church service on their own. That's why the Great Commission of Jesus begins with the word, "GO." You can't spell "God" without "go;" you can't spell "good news" without "go." You can't spell "golf" without "go" (but that's for next week.) Jesus said to "go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in so that my house may be full."

TIP #3: LEARN TO THINK LIKE A FISH

Jay told me fish behave in different ways, according to the conditions. He has studied fish enough to know where the fish are and what they are doing in different water conditions. That's how he knows where to cast his bait.

In order to be an effective people-catcher, you have to know something about how people without Christ live. One of our biggest challenges we face in "fishing for men" is the longer we are Christians, the less time we spend with non-believers. Jesus understood sinners, because he spent time with them, to win them. He didn't become a sinner; He just understood them. You don't have to jump into the water and swim underwater to be a good fisherman. You don't have to become a fish to catch fish. But you can evaluate the "water conditions" at your job or at school. We need to become students of our culture for the simple reason that we want to "catch people" out of it into life. For some of you that means you need to cultivate a genuine friendship with someone who isn't a Christian.

Sometimes I drive by a place like Clicks Billiards on a Friday or Saturday night and see it packed with people. There's an urge within me to go in there and pick up a pool cue and start talking to people about Jesus. What's that urge? It's Jesus making me into a fisher of men. I've thought about going in and after a game asking a guy, "I've often wondered, when life is over and you've run the table and there are no more shots to call, what then?" And then just listen. You say, "Horrors! Pastor! They're *drinking beer* there! They're *smoking* there! They're *gambling* there!" Right and some of them are lost and going to hell there, too. The Bible says that the enemies of Jesus accused Him of associating with tax collectors, sinners, and wine bibbers. Why? Because they were the one's who needed his message. If Jesus showed up in Tyler, do you think He'd show up here, or at Clicks?

Now, for my precious widows in the congregation, don't have a stroke. Don't worry, I'm not going to head in there alone, but don't be surprised if I ask one of you guys go play pool with me some Friday night. We've got to go where the fish are and think like a fish, but we don't have to become a fish! Someone said, "It's okay to drink like a fish if you're drinking what a fish

drinks!"

TIP #4: USE A VARIETY OF STRATEGIES

Now Jay says this is really important: A good fisherman must use the right lure for the right conditions. He has at least 50 different kinds of lures or bait he can use. When he is tournament fishing, he usually has eight rods and reels with different bait already on them so that he doesn't have to take the time to cut off one lure and tie on another one. He just picks up a different rod and reel and casts the new bait. He says sometimes it's a matter of trial and error to find which bait the fish are hitting. If one type doesn't work, he just tries another one. Good fishermen are always looking for new kinds of bait, too. They aren't afraid to try new approaches.

A good fisherman doesn't quit after one cast or even a dozen casts; he just tries a different bait – a different strategy. That's a great lesson for us. No two people are alike so there is no single approach to person evangelism that will work. Different people need different approaches. The same strategy won't work for everyone. That's exactly what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote in 1 Corinthians: "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews... To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel." (1 Corinthians 9:20-23)

He used one approach when he was with Jews and used a different approach when he was with Gentiles. We can't reach people for Christ the same way we used to in the 1970s, 80s or 90s. The fish haven't changed, but the water conditions have. You used to be able to walk down a street and knock on the doors of strangers. Thirty years ago, even unchurched people would invite you into their homes, give you glass of lemonade and carry on a conversation with you. That kind of "cold turkey" evangelism isn't as effective anymore. Today, more and more people are suspicious; they consider an unscheduled visit as an intrusion. More and more people are living in gated communities. We need to try a different strategy.

I've had Christians complain to me that people in the 21st century aren't as "receptive" to the gospel as they used to be. I disagree. People are receptive to the gospel; it's just going to take a different strategy to catch them than we used 30 years ago.

That's why I'm using this sports series to communicate the gospel. That's why we have a website and billboards on I-20 that invite people to visit www.go2heaven.net where they can learn how to become a Christian. That's one reason I've started my own blog called "From the Pasture." (that's pasture as in rolling green acres). If want to read it go to <http://fromthepasture.blogspot.com>.

When we try new strategies, we aren't changing the gospel; we're simply changing the way we present it. Don't ever confuse changing methodology with the changeless Gospel. Someone has said, "Methods are many; principles are few; methods change often, but principles never do."

As a church, we must continue to come up with new methods of "telling the old, old story of Jesus and His love." If you come up with a creative way to fish for people, let us know—or better yet, just go fishing!

TIP #5: BE PATIENT AND PERSISTENT

(1) Fish don't want to be caught

A good fisherman must learn to be patient. The day I went fishing with Jay, he knew there was a fish in a certain spot. I never saw it, but he cast his lure about 30 times in the exact same spot, and on the 30th cast, Bam! He caught a nice bass. He didn't give up. As we are fishing for men, we need to remember these two things: Number one, fish don't want to be caught. Not too many fish are going to jump into your boat. A fish is easily spooked and will try to get away. A person without Jesus may often resist and even resent your attempt to share Christ with them. That's okay. Love them, and keep sharing Christ with them. Don't give up after one try or two tries. Stay patient and persistent. Some people are reluctant to share Christ because they think talking about eternal matters of life and death makes a person uncomfortable. That may be true. I would think one of the most difficult conversations a physician ever has is to tell his patient he has discovered cancer. It would be a lot easier just to avoid talking about it. The patient doesn't want to hear it. It makes them feel uncomfortable. But the kindest, most loving thing a physician can do is to tell a patient what their illness is and how they are going to treat it. That's what sharing Christ is all about. People don't want to hear it but the most loving thing you can do is to tactfully share Jesus with them.

(2) Our job isn't to catch fish, it's to GO fishing

Are you fishing for people? If you're thinking, "I'm not sure." then you aren't. You'll know if you're fishing for people just like you'll know if you're fishing for fish. If you've ever been fishing before, would you raise your hand? Sure, nobody had to think, "I'm not sure if I have or haven't." It's a yes or no question. Next question: How many of you have ever CAUGHT a fish before? If you didn't raise your hand on the first question, you certainly didn't raise it on the second question. You can go fishing without catching fish, but you can't catch fish without going fishing! Don't raise your hand, but what if I asked, "How many of you have ever made a specific effort to lead someone into a personal relationship with God?" Next question, "How many of you have ever led a person to know Jesus?" If you didn't answer yes to the first questions, you couldn't answer yes to the second. You won't catch fish unless you go fishing, and you'll never capture people for Christ unless you make an intentional effort to fish for men, women, boys and girls. One day when we stand before the Master Fisherman, He won't ask, "How many fish did you catch?" The question He'll ask is, "How many times did you go fishing?"

God judges us on our obedience. Our job is to just share the gospel, go fishing, whether or not anyone is saved is up to God. I saw a sign in front of a church that said, "Fishers of men. You catch them and Jesus will clean them." I like that.

CONCLUSION

Let's rewind to the Sea of Galilee again. Peter moved out into the deep water and lowered his nets. He began to pull the net back into the boat, and suddenly the net stopped. Maybe his first thought was, "Oh, great! Now I'm hung on some rock!" But then he felt the movement of fish transferred through the net into his hands. There is always a sense of expectation involved in fishing. When you hook a fish, there's that time between the strike and when you first see the fish. How big is it? What kind is it? For me, it's "how big a turtle is it?" There's always the element of surprise. That certainly is true when you are obeying God as well! Peter kept pulling until he could see the fish—hundreds of them—thousands! His net was beginning to break and he realized he needed help. He called for James and John to come out and help him. They came to his aid and, together, they hauled the huge catch into the two boats. Effective evangelism is always a team effort. Their boats were so loaded down with hundreds of fish they were almost submerged.

But forget about the fish for a minute. I want you to notice Peter's reaction. I would have expected him to say, "Wow! Jesus, that's great! Look at all these fish! I want you in my boat every time I go fishing!" But instead, the Bible tells us Peter fell on his knees among those slimy fish and said to Jesus, "Go away from me, LORD, because I'm a sinful man." In that moment, Peter realized Jesus was more than a teacher, more than a carpenter, and more than a smart fisherman: He was the Lord of the Universe. And Peter fell before Jesus in reverence and adoration. He had been fishing all his life and had never seen anything like this before.

Jesus reassured Peter by saying, "Don't be afraid. I have a plan for you. I want you to fish for men!" I believe it was one of the hardest decisions of Peter's life to walk away from his boats, his nets, and his career. But it was the best decision he ever made! He followed Jesus and Jesus changed him into a people fisherman. About three years after this day, Peter stood in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter stood up to preach. He cast the net for people, and the miracle of the Sea of Galilee was repeated. The net was so full of people it almost broke. Three thousand people were saved and baptized on that one day!

Jesus is saying the same thing He said to Peter 2,000 years ago. Jesus says to us, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." (Mark 1:17) He didn't say, "Follow me, and you can decide for yourself if you want to fish for people." He said, "I'll MAKE YOU fishers of men." It all boils down to this: If you aren't fishing...you aren't following! So let's go fish!

OUTLINE

TIP #1: USE THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

- (1) The LURE is the message of Jesus Christ
- (2) The HOOK is the conviction of the Holy Spirit
- (3) The REEL is the will of God the Father

TIP #2: GO WHERE THE FISH ARE

TIP #3: LEARN TO THINK LIKE A FISH

TIP #4: USE A VARIETY OF STRATEGIES

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- (2) Our job isn't to catch fish, it's to GO fishing



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes