

Gone Fishin' by Jack Selcher

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Gone Fishin' Covenant

- I won't dominate discussions or give unwanted advice.
- I'll participate in class discussions and complete assignments.
- Whatever is said in the group is confidential.

With God's help, I agree to abide by these promises to God and our small group.

Signature _____ Date _____

Gone Fishin'

Lesson 1
Pray for Success



Volunteers should read the following paragraphs. Discuss, evaluate or respond to the material in bold print as you go.

Begin with prayer – Let’s invite the Holy Spirit to lead our group to understand and live the truth and prepare us to be a channel of blessing to others.

Vision: These lessons will equip, encourage and empower us to attract, win, and assimilate a constant stream of co-workers, friends, neighbors and relatives to Christ and our church.

Objective: To construct a prayer-foundation to reach loved ones and co-workers for Christ.

*The focus of *Gone Fishin'* is reaching persons we know for Christ. Sometimes the author uses only the term “co-worker” for brevity. Most of the principles described also apply to reaching friends, neighbors and relatives.*

Independence

Bill Gates became successful through ingenuity and effort. That works in business, but it takes more than that to be successful in evangelism. Self-reliance *prevents* spiritual fruitfulness. Ingenuity, creativity and effort have a place, but they’re the twigs and small branches of the evangelism tree. Prayer is the root. P. T. Forsythe said that our worst sin is prayerlessness, because of what it says about who we really think is in charge of the church and the universe.

Area	Rating (1-10)
Personal life	
Small group	
Church	

Rate the strength of the existing prayer foundation of your personal life, our small group and our church. Explain your ratings.

Believing prayer shows dependence on God. “He [Jesus] replied, ‘This kind can come out only by prayer’” (Mark 9:29). Human nature prefers independence! We demonstrate our hard core sinful nature by using our time, abilities and money to please ourselves, not God. God doesn’t build his kingdom through proud, self-absorbed, independent people. He opposes them. “Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble’” (1 Peter 5:5). Sharing our faith without dependence on God’s Spirit produces no lasting fruit. People feel their need for Christ only when the Holy Spirit is working. “When he [Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8). Prayer is one way we nurture a living connection with Christ. In John 15:5 Jesus says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Discuss: Ways my independence hinders the effectiveness of my witness include....

Persevering Prayer

It makes a lot of sense to pray. For hook-and-line fishermen to be successful, fish have to open their mouths. For evangelists to be successful, unbelievers have to open their hearts. Without the influence of the Holy Spirit, no one will acknowledge Jesus as Lord. “Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3). Evangelistic effectiveness depends on our prayers and the prayer ministries of our church. More persons praying for laborers for the harvest and for the lost bring more evangelistic fruit. “‘Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field’” (Matthew 9:38).

Lily Tomlin said, “I always wanted to be somebody... I should have been more specific.” As believers we want to reach somebody, but we have to be specific. When we pray for specific people and expect God to work in their lives, he does; however, the results aren’t always predictable.

Sometimes we pray for years before loved ones come to faith in Christ. Sometimes they die without ever receiving him (as far as we know). Praying for the salvation of our loved ones is similar to praying for physical healing. Not everyone for whom we pray is healed, but far more are healed than would be if we didn’t pray. One clear theme of Scripture is how much prayer can accomplish.

“‘If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer’” (Matthew 21:22).

“‘Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective’” (James 5:16).

“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened” (Luke 11:9-10).

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7). Praying about everything includes praying for the salvation of our friends, relatives, co-workers and neighbors.

Discuss: Share a prayer-victory concerning a person for whom you prayed that became a Christian.

Mysterious Prayer

God thinks and behaves differently than we do. “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” (Isaiah 55:8-9). Mystery, like thick fog, veils God’s work on earth. We naturally think in either/or categories. Either God is in control *or* people have free will. Reality is that God is in control *and* human beings have free will. God is never surprised when people repent and receive his Son. “He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will” (Ephesians 1:5). People have free will and often reject or resist what’s best for them. We’ve all done it. “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Some stubbornly cling to the deceptive “freedoms” of spiritual death when they could have life that really satisfies. “Yet you refuse to come to me [Jesus] to have life” (John 5:40).

Discuss: Let’s talk about someone for whose salvation we’ve prayed that hasn’t seemed to come any closer to Christ. What keeps you praying?

Regular Prayer

Setting aside daily time to pray adds regular abiding in Christ structure to our lives. It says, “This time is special, Lord, and I’m setting it apart to meet with you in our customary place.” If we set a regular time, we’ll pray more consistently than if we don’t. Our prayer life needs to include more than praying through lists. “Abiding in Christ” praying embraces praise, confession, thanksgiving and quiet time to hear the Lord’s voice.

Discuss: Let’s evaluate how we’ve organized our life to spend regular time in prayer and how balanced our prayer life is (including praise, confession, thanksgiving, quiet time, asking for things for self and others).

Setting aside a regular time and place will strengthen our prayer life, but we're also commanded to pray throughout the day. "Pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Such prayer goes beyond a daily prayer appointment with God. Recurring prayer throughout the day is a mark of spiritual maturity. Such "geyser" prayers could be intercession for someone who needs God's healing, spontaneous thanks for a blessing received, or a request for salvation of a co-worker. Praying continually includes constantly depending on God, acknowledging his presence, yielding to his will and seeking his purpose for our life as we live it moment by moment.

Later we'll compile a list of five persons (including co-workers) with whom we have a close relationship and influence. These persons haven't received Jesus Christ's offer of salvation or don't regularly attend church. Some unchurched persons might be Christians, but like chickens outside the hen house, they're very vulnerable. We're not satisfied when professing Christians don't attend church, even if they are. We're also not satisfied with those who attend church regularly but don't know Jesus. We'll pray for the persons on our list daily, claiming 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Prayer for the Lost

A personal prayer list is a good start, but we need to do more. Effective evangelistic churches pray for lost people in many settings -- in small groups of laypersons, the pastor and staff, worship services, youth meetings, or some other way. Prayer was the underlying strength of every evangelistic method used by the 576 effective evangelistic churches Dr. Thom Rainer studied (*Effective Evangelistic Churches*, Broadman & Holman Publishers). He discovered that churches with an ongoing prayer ministry specifically for the lost are almost always growing.

Our small group is an excellent place to pray for the lost. At the end of this lesson we'll each have five lost persons on a personal prayer list. We'll pray for them by name regularly during our group meetings. We'll also hold one another accountable to pray privately for and reach out to these loved ones in practical ways that demonstrate Jesus' love. In addition, as a group we'll serve some of them in ways that meet their needs. Periodically, we'll also talk about signs we see of God at work in their lives.

We want to be more effective witnesses for Christ at work and attract others to him and his church. Evangelism includes sowing, watering, cultivating and harvesting. Most of our evangelistic efforts are preparation for harvesting. Often someone else will be the harvester. Evangelists Larry and Luella Hale ministered in a church in Appalachian, New York. They harvested spiritual fruit that was sown, watered and cultivated by one of the elders of the church. This elder spent considerable time with a man preparing the way for him to decide to follow Jesus. This is the norm, not the exception.

We're not just looking for people to pray to receive Christ. We're not satisfied with "decisions" that don't change lives. Our purpose is making more and better disciples.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20). The Great Commission includes moving persons with whom we work toward Christ (evangelism), helping them mature in the faith, mobilizing them in ministry, and developing them into spiritual leaders in some phase of God’s kingdom work. None of these things will happen without a prayer-foundation. That brings us to how we’ll pray for lost co-workers, friends, relatives and neighbors.

How to Pray for the Lost

We’re going to use a 7-3 strategy to pray more effectively in our group for our spiritual influence among friends, neighbors, relatives and co-workers.

The 7. We’ll pray we’ll be...

1. ATTRACTIVE – We’re the frame around Jesus’ picture: “...so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (Titus 2:10).
2. BOLD – We’ll speak up for Jesus tactfully yet boldly. “Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel” (Ephesians 6:19).
3. CLEAR – We want to share the gospel and our own faith story clearly. “Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should” (Colossians 4:4).
4. DISCERNING – We need to know when doors are and aren’t open to the gospel. “And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains” (Colossians 4:3).
5. EXCELLENT – We need God’s help to do our work and live our life in a way that brings him glory, not reproach. “In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).
6. FAIR – We need God’s grace to treat others fairly: “Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair...” (Colossians 4:1).
7. WISE – We need ability to read the signs of God at work. “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Colossians 4:6).

The 3. We’ll pray our lost loved ones will be...

1. CONVICTED – They don’t see their self-oriented life is wrong. “When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8).
2. DISSATISFIED – Their substitutes for God are stealing away their life, but they don’t realize it. “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).
3. PERCEPTIVE – They don’t really understand the gospel. “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the

minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

We’ll use this Scripture-based 7-3 model when we pray for the lost privately and in our group meeting.

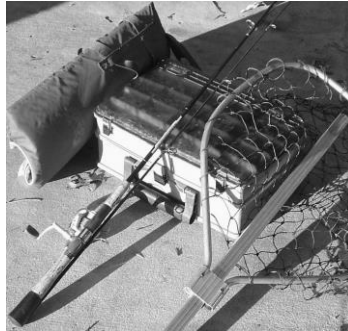
Let’s each compile a list of 5 persons for whose salvation we’ll pray daily, including at least one co-worker.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

How frequently will we pray in our small group for lost loved ones and co-workers after we’ve completed the Gone Fishin’ course?

Lesson 2

Prepare to Fish



Volunteers should read the following paragraphs. Discuss, evaluate or respond to the material in bold print as you go.

Begin with prayer – Let’s invite the Holy Spirit to lead our group to understand and live the truth and prepare us to be a channel of blessing to others.

Vision: These lessons will equip, encourage and empower us to attract, win, and assimilate a constant stream of co-workers, friends, neighbors and relatives to Christ and our church.

Prayer: Let’s pray for one another’s list of lost co-workers, family and friends using first names only. We’ll swap lists (p. 9) with someone else in the group and use the 7-3 model explained in Lesson 1 to guide our praying. We’ll pray that we’ll be attractive, bold, clear, discerning, excellent, fair and wise and those we’re reaching out to will be convicted, dissatisfied and perceptive.

Objective: To prepare to fish at work and in our neighborhood by being clean, bold, and Spirit-filled.

1 Peter 3:15

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15). **According to this verse, what two things must we do before we can take our faith to work?”** Let’s read it one more time before we respond. **Which of these two is more difficult for you? Why? On a scale of 1-10, how prepared do you feel to share the reason for your hope?”** (1 = totally unprepared and 10 = completely prepared”). **Share challenges you’ve experienced in sharing your faith at work or in your neighborhood that illustrate the need for surrender to Christ and for preparation.**

Matthew 4:19

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). **Based on this verse, what’s our part in fishing at work? What’s Jesus’ part? If we’re not fishing for men, what else aren’t we doing very well?** Fishing for men has no closed season, size or creel limits-- red and yellow, black and white, young or old, big or small. We can fish whenever we want and keep everything we catch. Successful fishermen prepare for their fishing trips. They organize their tackle, check their boat, motor and trailer, find their lake maps, prepare food, etc. We prepare to fish for men by applying the CBS of witness preparation.

CBS

The C represents “clean,” the B, “bold,” and the S, “Spirit-filled.” Two fishermen met on vacation and were soon telling fish stories. The first described a 295-pound salmon he caught on four-pound test line that took him hours to land. He didn’t spare a single detail. The second told about snagging a lantern made in 1912 on a lure while fishing in a local lake. The most amazing thing -- the lantern was still burning! The first fisherman got right to the point. He said, “I’ll take 280 pounds off my salmon, if you’ll put out the light in your lantern!”

Satan’s goal is to extinguish our light. Jesus said, “In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). Our light shines at work and in our community by our words, attitudes and behavior. When it does, the captives of darkness can’t help but notice. We can expect many “cockroach” and a few “moth” responses. When our light shines, the majority of not-yet-believers will want to get away from it like cockroaches run when the lights are turned on at night. Some of them, however, will be attracted to our light like moths to a light bulb. **To what degree does this moth-cockroach analogy ring true in your experience? Can you share any real life examples?**

It’s essential to let our light shine by the way we live, but that’s not enough. Based on information gathered by surveys the author did with about 30 ERC congregations, people rarely ask those who attend ERC churches why they’re so different, even if the difference between them and their co-workers is dramatic. Fewer than 10% of people in these congregations have been asked three or more times in their lifetime something similar to: “What makes you so different?” **How many of us have been asked three or more times, something like, “What makes you so different?” Why are few believers asked that question?**

We have to take the initiative to share God’s word with others. They aren’t won to Christ just by watching us. “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). **What does this verse identify as a key element in persons coming to faith in Christ?**

As we'll see, when the message is sown on cultivated soil (a prepared heart), it's far more likely to yield a harvest than when it's sown on uncultivated soil. Remember CBS. Effective witnesses for Christ are clean, bold and Spirit-filled.

Be Clean

To be an effective witness, we have to be clean. "If a man cleanses himself from the latter [self-serving purposes], he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work" (2 Timothy 2:21). We naturally spend considerable effort trying to cover up or excuse our sins. We can fool others for a while, but sooner or later our sins catch up with us. God knows every un-Jesus-like area in our life. We can't fool him at all.

God's solution is to call sin what he does -- SIN! He wants us to change our attitude toward it, forsake it and receive his cleansing. The corrosion of a battery's terminals blocks the flow of electrical current. Sin blocks the flow of God's power through our life. We can clean battery terminals with baking soda. When we do, the current flow is restored. Confession is God's baking soda. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Confession makes us usable.

What sins do we need to confess? Does our use of time and money prove our priorities are in order? Is God getting leftovers? "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matthew 6:33). Have we lost our first love for Jesus? Are we holding grudges against and refusing to forgive others?

During the next two minutes let's silently confess the specific sins of which God convicts us so we can be clean channels through whom living water can flow to others. This isn't something we only do once. Whenever there's "dirt," there's a need for cleansing.

Be Bold

"Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should" (Ephesians 6:19-20). Living by faith means taking risks. Don't expect cooperating with God in his saving work to feel safe. We can't rescue anyone from our comfort zone. Reaching out evangelistically today feels risky, even if we've already done it 100 times this year.

Resistance to extending God's kingdom comes from three sources. The devil doesn't allow us to take his prisoners of war uncontested any more than a mother bear would allow us to carry away her cubs without a fight. In addition, that part of us that loves to be in control and go its own way doesn't take risks for others' benefit. Furthermore, the

dominant values and beliefs of our culture oppose the expansion of God's control in human lives.

Lifeguards and firemen take risks to rescue others. Even if they're successful, those rescued eventually die of other causes. How much more should we take risks for the *eternal* welfare of others!

Reaching out evangelistically is like our first plunge off the high diving board. It starts with fear and ends with exhilaration. This is true even when others don't embrace our message, because God fills us with the joy of the obedient. Let's plunge into the evangelistic opportunities God provides, depending on Jesus' promise, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20b). *When God pushes us to leave our comfort zone, it's unsafe to remain in it!*

Share a time when you stepped out of your comfort zone to take a stand for Christ. How did you feel when you first recognized the opportunity, and after you allowed God to use you?

Be Filled with the Holy Spirit

The control and power of the Holy Spirit are essential to evangelism. We must daily yield the steering wheel of our life (mind, emotions and will) to the Spirit of Christ. Since God commands us to be filled with his Spirit, it's obviously his will. "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). God guarantees he'll answer every prayer that's in harmony with his will. "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us -- whatever we ask -- we know that we have what we asked of him" (1 John 5:14-15). We can literally do anything God asks us to do when we're filled with his Spirit.

How are both submission and faith connected to being controlled and empowered by the Holy Spirit? Which of the two do you find more difficult?

Our CBS assignments:

1. Every day spend two minutes of your prayer time in silence before God. Ask him to reveal anything in your life that displeases him. Confess it and claim his forgiveness.
2. Speak or act boldly for Jesus at least once before the next class meeting. Next time we'll have an opportunity to share how we stepped out in faith despite fear. Our step of faith can be a small one. We might share in ten seconds in a conversation with a co-worker something God has taught us recently. We could demonstrate love to a neighbor by meeting a need and explaining it as just wanting to show God's love in a practical way.
3. Claim the filling of the Holy Spirit every day, and ask for opportunities to demonstrate his love in practical ways to others.

Lesson 3

Know the Fish



Volunteers should read the following paragraphs. Discuss, evaluate or respond to the material in bold print as you go.

Begin with prayer – Let’s invite the Holy Spirit to lead our group to understand and live the truth and prepare us to be a channel of blessing to others.

Vision: These lessons will equip, encourage and empower us to attract, win, and assimilate a constant stream of co-workers, friends, neighbors and relatives to Christ and our church.

Review: In the CBS of witness preparation, The C stands for _____, the B for _____, and the S for _____.

Prayer: Let’s pray for one another’s list of lost co-workers, family and friends using first names only. We’ll swap lists (p.9) with someone else in the group and use the 7-3 model explained in Lesson 1 to guide our praying. We’ll pray that we’ll be attractive, bold, clear, discerning, excellent, fair and wise and those we’re reaching out to will be convicted, dissatisfied and perceptive.

Objective: To evaluate the spiritual openness of our co-workers, family and friends.

Study for Success

Successful fishermen seem consistently lucky. They’re not. They work at fishing. They’ve honed their skills and knowledge through countless hours on the water. Year after year some of the same persons win the “Big Fish Contest” sponsored by the Harrisburg Patriot News. They know more about the species they pursue and have more highly developed fishing skills for that species than less successful anglers do. No two species behave exactly the same. Therefore, consistently catching any species requires a unique knowledge and skill set.

“What are you fishing for?” I’ve frequently asked other fishermen. They’ve often responded, “Whatever bites!” I’ve observed that those most likely to catch *nothing* are those who fish for *anything*. Applied knowledge, specific for each kind of fish, separates skilled fishermen from those who don’t really care whether they catch fish or not. This same principle applies to the evangelistic strategy of churches. Those who try to reach *everybody* are more likely to reach *nobody* than churches who focus on a specific segment of society, e.g. young married persons with children or those who battle addictive behavior.

For whom are we fishing? It matters. No fishing method or lure always works. Neither does a single evangelistic approach. The lure or bait fishermen use depends on what they’re trying to catch. Our evangelistic approach depends on our audience. The best lure is always love, but *love must get to its destination*. Love sent isn’t always received! We might love our sister and send her a birthday card, but if it gets lost in the mail, she won’t be happy. Love sometimes gets lost in the mail. **Share a time in your life when that happened.**

Sharing the “Four Spiritual Laws” with a co-worker or neighbor who’s very receptive to hearing and believing the gospel will be interpreted as a loving action. Sharing the same message with someone with zero biblical understanding whom we hardly know probably won’t. He’ll likely misinterpret our loving communication as an arrogant attempt to ram our beliefs down his throat. He has no idea what we’re talking about and doesn’t want to hear it.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 below. What timeless principles for evangelism do we find in this passage?

“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 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, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). Sharing the plan of salvation is essential at some point for a person to come to faith in Christ. **How does Romans 10:17 describe faith’s foundation?** Timing is everything. Sharing it too soon with the biblically uninformed and pressing for a decision could be counterproductive. Not sharing it soon enough could result in someone slipping into eternity without an opportunity to receive Christ.

To catch a fish our lure or bait has to connect with its needs. Those who fish for native brook trout in small mountain streams don’t use a ten-inch lure because trout don’t eat

items bigger than they are! On the other hand, that ten-inch lure might be ideal for muskellunge which routinely eat other fish that size or bigger. What are our co-workers' and neighbors' unmet needs and unanswered questions? They're potential entry points for the gospel. To identify these entry points, we have to get to know them.

Evaluate Spiritual Receptivity

In Acts 17:32-34, Paul received three different responses to the same message. “When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject.’ At that, Paul left the Council. A few men became followers of Paul and believed.” Record the three responses below:

1) Some

2)Some

3) Some

People in our workplaces and neighborhoods respond differently to an explanation of the gospel. In *The Unchurched Nextdoor*, Dr. Thom Rainer identifies five levels of responsiveness based on an extensive survey of unchurched people:

- 1 - Highly receptive to hearing and believing the Good News
- 2 - Receptive to the gospel and church
- 3 - Neutral, with no clear signs of being interested yet perhaps being open to discussion
- 4 - Resistant to the gospel, but with no antagonistic attitude
- 5 - Highly antagonistic and even hostile to the gospel

Using the Rainer Scale, rate the responsiveness of your co-workers/neighbors (first name only) for whom you're regularly praying:

First Name	Rating (1-5)

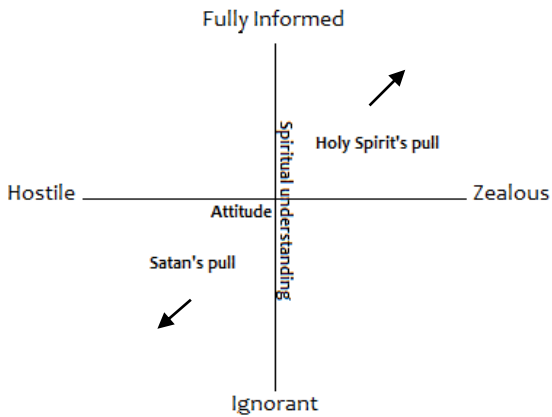
Reflecting on our co-workers' spiritual understanding and attitudes toward biblical Christianity helps us relate to them. Even if they attend church regularly, they might not grasp God's plan of salvation. The Barna Group reports that Protestant church attenders are more than twice as likely as Catholic church attenders to be born again Christians (61% to 26%, respectively in 2007). Many who attend church regularly aren't connected to Christ. Neither are most who don't attend. Probably many of our co-workers are somewhere in the lower

left quadrant of the following graph with minimal understanding of God and little or no enthusiasm for biblical Christianity. How do we reach such persons? To come to Christ people need sufficient knowledge, a positive attitude toward the faith, and a sense of urgency that results from the conviction of the Holy Spirit. God can use our words to increase their knowledge of spiritual realities, our love to change their attitude from negative to positive and his Spirit to create the urgency.

Got Armor?

The two arrows on the graph illustrate the spiritual battle in which we're entrenched. The Holy Spirit seeks to maximize zeal, knowledge of God and obedience to his ways. Satan seeks to minimize all three. The challenge is to keep our attitude enthusiastic, our knowledge of God growing, and our trust in his promises strong when we're being attacked. "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:14-17).

How does each piece of armor equip us for the challenge?



"To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'" (John 8:31-32). A recent Barna Research Group survey on what Americans believe asked the question, "Is there absolute truth?" Sixty-six percent of adults agree that "there is no such thing as absolute truth; different people can define truth in conflicting ways and still be correct." Seventy-two percent of 18 to 25-year-olds agree. **How does rejection of**

absolute truth play right into Satan's hands? In what sense is the whole spiritual war a battle for truth?

Got Love?

How can we change people who are hostile toward Christians and the church? By ourselves, we can't. When the whole world was hostile toward God, he sent his Son to win them back by meeting their deepest needs through self-sacrifice. Most of them didn't respond positively, but some did and some still do. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Like Jesus, we sacrifice our own desires and agenda to help meet their needs. We bring Christ who lives in and through us close to them through being kind, answering their questions, seeking to understand, listening to their stories without arguing, apologizing for the offenses of well-meaning Christians, building a relationship on what we have in common, and being real. Over time we can share how Jesus has healed our brokenness.

Got Permission?

We address co-workers' ignorance about spiritual things bit by bit. They must allow it. Part of their ignorance is chosen and part isn't. We trust God to open their eyes to spiritual realities. That's necessary because "The god of this age has blinded the minds of

unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4). We practice evangelism by permission. We ask questions like, "May I share with you something the Bible teaches about God?" We share spiritual truths in bite-size pieces using everyday words.

Got Patience?

Over time progressively we share more and more of the gospel, including man’s original condition of fellowship with God; the fall from fellowship through sin; the nature of sin and its universal presence; the results of our sin; who Jesus is; how his death on the cross, burial and resurrection solved our sin problem; and the need to turn around and receive the forgiveness God offers. We share both the reward and cost of following Jesus. When the time is right, we ask if they want to know Christ. “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15b-16a). We must be gentle and respectful always. By God’s grace some hard hearts will soften. Some who were spiritually blind will see and believe!

In the process of leading persons toward Christ, they often ask questions about the faith. If we feel a need to take a detour from *Gone Fishin’* to get some answers to these questions, two excellent websites to visit are <http://www.carm.org/objections.htm> and www.wayofthemaster.com. under “Get Equipped.” Do we want to take a detour or proceed to Lesson 4?

Lesson 4



Attract the Fish

Volunteers should read the following paragraphs. Discuss, evaluate or respond to the material in bold print as you go.

Begin with prayer – Let's invite the Holy Spirit to lead our group to understand and live the truth and prepare us to be a channel of blessing to others.

Vision: These lessons will equip, encourage and empower us to attract, win, and assimilate a constant stream of co-workers, friends, neighbors and relatives to Christ and our church.

Prayer: Let's pray for one another's list of lost co-workers, family and friends using first names only. We'll swap lists (p. 9) with someone else in the group and use the 7-3 model explained in Lesson 1 to guide our praying. We'll pray that we'll be attractive, bold, clear, discerning, excellent, fair and wise and those we're reaching out to will be convicted, dissatisfied and perceptive.

Objective: To consider how our competence in doing our job and the way we treat our co-workers determine our ability to bring Jesus to our workplace.

Meet Needs

Like people, fish are attracted by things that meet their needs. The specifics vary with every species of fish and with the time of year. Fish location is determined by such things as hiding places, water temperature, food supply, current or lack of the same, and competition with other species. God designed animals to get the most energy possible from their environment with the least amount of effort. This increases the chance they'll successfully reproduce after their kind. For more extensive coverage of God's wisdom principles that are hard-wired into his creatures, see *Becoming an Enthusiastic Church* by John W. Selcher, available through the Eastern Regional Conference, 900 South Arlington Ave., Suite 213, Harrisburg, PA 17109.

All fish seek living space that increases their chances of getting a meal. Some gather around rocks or aquatic vegetation and trees that have fallen into the water. Some fishermen take advantage of this trait by planting objects underwater in marked spots. They later return to these areas to fish. A recent development in freshwater fishing is the

use of artificial weeds to attract fish. Ice fishermen drill holes in the ice in a circle around where they're fishing. They lower these artificial weeds to the bottom through these holes. Within minutes fish begin to gather.

Most fish feed selectively. Sharks aren't big on pineapple or green beans! During a fishing trip for bluefish on the Chesapeake Bay, the captain chummed with chopped up fish continually while the boat was anchored in one spot. It took 30 minutes for us to attract and catch the first bluefish, but the action was steady the rest of our trip.

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task” (2 Corinthians 2:14-16)? Spreading the sweet smell of Christ isn't automatic. We must rely on God's grace to live like a believer. Our influence for Christ at work is either positive or negative. If our words, attitudes and actions repel our co-workers, they won't care a lick about our spiritual convictions. Condemning, judgmental, “I'm OK, but you're not” behavior won't make us fruitful. It drives others away and turns them against us and our faith. The opposite is also true. *Gone Fishin'* is about passing on the sweet smell of the undeserved favor God has poured out upon us.

Be a Friend

Attracting persons to ourselves is vital, but it isn't the goal. We're ultimately seeking to lead them to Jesus. How do we attract people to ourselves? Outgoing persons just have to be themselves, and it happens without much conscious effort. It isn't automatic for the introverted. The best way for introverts to make a friend is to be a friend. When opportunities to serve our co-workers arise, we should ask what a friend would do, and do it. God can use us all to spread his sweet-smelling fragrance in the workplace. The Jesus who lives in us must live through us. We can't reach everyone. Some won't like our personality or our Christ! Some will like us, but won't follow our Jesus. After the author shared the gospel with a man, that man said, “You're telling me that if I don't believe the way you do, I'm going to hell! [Pause] I *still* like you!” Maybe that's because the author visited him and his wife regularly and took him fishing. Hardly any of our unsaved co-workers will like our Jesus if they don't like us first. When Jesus lives his life through us, some will be drawn toward him! **How does Paul describe this flow through life in the following verse?** “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Do Your Job Well

God planted us in our place of employment to bring Jesus to our co-workers. Life isn't about the money we earn, the worldly influence we possess or the “toys” we accumulate. It's about letting the light of Jesus shine *through* us. Jesus said, “In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in

heaven” (Matthew 5:16). It’s got to be a full-time light. If it shines part-time like motion detecting lights on a house, others will focus on when it’s off and see hypocrisy. When we focus on *competence, integrity* and *caring*, we’re letting Jesus live his life through us at work. All these characteristics are true of him. God designed a church of 100 to be the word made flesh in 100 different places simultaneously. Are we doing our part? God can’t build a fully devoted church through part-time Christians!

We bring Jesus to our co-workers by doing our work well, just as he did! The furniture that came out of his carpenter shop was of the highest quality. I’d love to have an original Jesus stool, wouldn’t you? He was the same master craftsman whether he worked with wood, human needs or spoke the world into existence. “People were overwhelmed with amazement. ‘He has done everything well,’ they said...” (Mark 7:37).

Laziness leads us to try to harvest the greatest possible rewards (salary, benefits, vacation, sick leave, etc.) with the least possible effort. Some of us are energy-challenged! The Bible says, “Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest”(Proverbs 6:6-8).

Albert (not his real name) was a summer helper for the Pennsylvania Fish Commission in the early 1970s. During his stint with the PFC, he was never commended for doing everything well! One day he was with a PFC biologist named Roger (not his real name) electrofishing a small stream. Both Albert and Roger had a net in one hand and an electrode in the other. When AC current is passed through water it stuns fish between the electrodes. Both electrodes must be in the stream or the electrical current won’t flow. With great frustration one day, Roger said to Albert, “Albert, between us we have one net and one electrode in the water -- and I’m holding both of them!” If in the early 1970s Albert had a faith to talk about, who’d listen?

For others to value what we have to say, they have to respect us. That respect is closely connected to how well we do our job. Paul wrote, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (Colossians 3:23-24). **How do these verses provide motivation for competence?** When we do our work well once (to please the Lord), we get paid twice! If we don’t do our job well, we might be close to not getting paid at all! **Based on your last performance evaluation, write one thing you could do to improve your job competence.**

Guard Your Integrity

Competence isn’t enough. Corporate executives at Tyco and Enron had competence, but not integrity. When tempted to help themselves to corporate funds, they grabbed with both hands. Integrity is the set of rails that keep us on track in the darkness of “no one will ever know,” far from the daylight of over-the-shoulder supervision. It’s not only

executives that experience integrity-failure. Every work situation carries its own temptations to cut corners for personal gain. Those gone fishin' in the work place can't afford to take unethical short-cuts. Both God and co-workers are watching. Therefore, may it never be that someone could identify our employer by examining the pens or other office supplies at our house! Let it not be said that we call in sick when we're not, socialize excessively or goof off on the job, pad expense accounts, spend time on the internet unconnected to the performance of our job, do personal business during work hours, work fewer hours than we should, or pull strings to get ahead. Maybe most of us have a bit of confession to attend to right now! **Let's spend a moment silently reflecting on our integrity and confessing to God any lapses along with a commitment to represent him better at work.** His promise is, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). **We'll allow two minutes for this soul-searching exercise.**

Those with integrity give 100 percent every day at work no matter what others do. They're trustworthy. Over the long haul with average ability and perseverance, they outperform those with more ability but less integrity. Justice catches up with liars, thieves and cheats, if not in this life, in the next. Sooner or later their train is going off the tracks. **Let's share job pressures that make it hard to keep our integrity.**

Demonstrate Caring

We lead co-workers toward Christ by first attracting them to our way of life. That means playing the music of a life in tune with a loving, caring God. An ounce of demonstrating the difference Christ makes is worth a ton of explanation. Forgiving those who've offended us isn't standard operating procedure in the world. The Amish got headlines for it following the Nickel Mines shootings. Helping a co-worker in a pinch leaves a lasting sense of gratitude in his heart. Speaking encouraging words to one with whom we're competing for a promotion raises eyebrows. When our words, attitudes and actions help meet our co-workers needs, some of them will move toward us relationally. When we go out of our way to show we care, they'll move even closer. We help co-workers feel competent, significant, valued and loved by living out the biblical principle to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39).

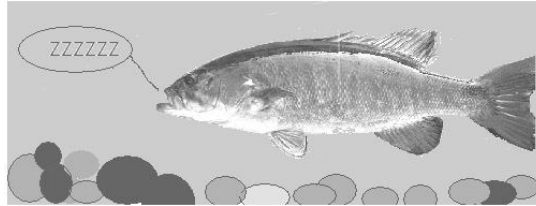
Impact requires closeness. We can get people's attention and respect with our competence and integrity, but that doesn't mean their heart's door is open to us. Elizabeth Selcher never married. She frequently visited her brother, sister-in-law and five nephews on weekends. She often brought them candy. She was a very competent seamstress who worked at an upscale clothing store in Harrisburg called Mary Sachs. Her nephews never doubted her integrity. Nevertheless, apart from her input of sugar into their diet, her effect on them was minimal.

In 1956 when Elizabeth was 64, a year away from retirement, her sister-in-law died at 37 after complications from an operation, leaving five sons behind. Elizabeth quit her job immediately and moved into her brother's home to help care for her nephews (ages 1, 5, 7, 7, and 13). Over the next 23 years her influence on them was profound. Closeness

impacts far more than candy! **What does this say about giving material things compared to giving our time and energy to meet someone's need?**

Lesson 5

Target Active Fish



Volunteers should read the following paragraphs. Discuss, evaluate or respond to the material in bold print as you go.

Begin with prayer – Let’s invite the Holy Spirit to lead our group to understand and live the truth and prepare us to be a channel of blessing to others.

Vision: These lessons will equip, encourage and empower us to attract, win, and assimilate a constant stream of co-workers, friends, neighbors and relatives to Christ and our church.

Prayer: Let’s pray for one another’s list of lost co-workers, family and friends using first names only. We’ll swap lists (p. 9) with someone else in the group and use the 7-3 model explained in Lesson 1 to guide our praying. We’ll pray that we’ll be attractive, bold, clear, discerning, excellent, fair and wise and those we’re reaching out to will be convicted, dissatisfied and perceptive.

Objective: To focus our outreach energy in the workplace on those most receptive to our message.

Review: How does the way we do our job and treat our co-workers form the foundation for good fishin’?” Discuss.

Focus on the Receptive

The activity level in a fish population varies. Some fish are inactive and just not feeding. For the moment they’re almost uncatchable on hook and line, but they won’t always be such. Tonight or tomorrow they might be actively feeding. Some fish are in a neutral feeding mode and can be teased into biting. Some fish are actively feeding and relatively easy to catch if a fisherman casts near them. Wise fishermen target active fish. In the Susquehanna River, for example, actively feeding smallmouth bass are much more likely to be found near rock ridges than in the river sections between rock ridges.

The Apostle Paul focused on receptive persons. In Pisidian Antioch he shared the gospel with the Jews first. When most of them weren’t receptive to his message, he said, “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider

yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed" (Acts 13:46-48). Paul ministered only briefly in Athens where few were receptive to his message. He spent three years preaching and teaching in Ephesus during his third missionary journey and saw much fruit.

Jesus' hometown of Nazareth wasn't receptive to his message. "And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith" (Matthew 13:58). He spent most of his ministry time where people were more receptive.

The same principle applies to our co-workers who don't know Jesus. At any given time most of them aren't actively pursuing God. More likely, they're intentionally ignoring or running from him. If given a gospel tract, they won't read it. Why should they? As long as their life is relatively stress-free and even keel, they won't make any changes. We must be patient. Life is like Lake Erie. It might be calm today, but sooner or later storms appear out of nowhere. When the boat is tossed about by the seven-foot waves of circumstances, those aboard begin looking for help anywhere they can find it. Now they're much more likely to be at least neutral if not positive toward the gospel. When someone's life is seemingly under control, however, leading them to Christ is like trying to sell a bucket of snow to an Eskimo! **To what extent is our own openness to making changes in our life related to how much stress we're experiencing? Let's share with each other one or two major changes we've made in our life and the stress factors that motivated us to make them. How does this principle apply to our outreach to our co-workers?**

Those who work in a large office, don't have the time, personality, energy or financial resources to build relational bridges with everyone. We demonstrate Christian caring to those in our sphere of influence, and see who responds. We focus on building relationships with about five persons unconnected to Jesus with whom we've some natural connection or common interest. "Unconnected" describes either churchied or unchurchied persons who don't have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It isn't wise for married persons to build close relationships with persons of the opposite sex. Those who fish for that kind often get yanked into the water by the fish!

Over time these five, or perhaps other co-workers in our sphere of influence, will experience life crises which soften their hearts and convince them they need to live life differently. The best way to demonstrate caring is to help meet their needs when they're hurting. We do for them what we'd want someone to do for us in their situation. **Let's write down needs of the five unconnected co-workers for whom we're praying. Which ones seem to be under the greatest weight of stress-producing circumstances?**

We've already considered the importance of boldness when we talked about preparing to fish. Let's consider some specific ways to demonstrate courageous faith. One way to

identify those who are receptive is to make faith casts during everyday conversations and see who responds.

Use a Search Lure

Fishermen locate fish by using a search lure they can retrieve quickly and cast often to explore a lot of water. The goal is to find patterns of fish location. Maybe all the fish are being caught in 2-4 feet of water near the shoreline. When fishermen know where the feeding fish are, they often switch to another lure to catch them. Since about 90% of a stream, river or lake contains few if any feeding fish, it's a tremendous advantage to concentrate fishing effort where active fish are feeding. We can apply the same principle to fishing at work to find persons receptive to spiritual conversations.

We can talk briefly (15 seconds or less) but repeatedly with co-workers, about the difference our faith makes to our daily life. For example, "I was anxious about today's sales presentation until I prayed about it. Now I have a calm assurance God will help me through it." We can share these faith-snap-shots with believing co-workers and let pre-Christians overhear. We can communicate them directly to pre-Christians. For example, "Yesterday when I tried to start my car in the driveway, I discovered the battery was dead. That could've happened 100 miles from home. God was certainly watching over me." These are short clips of how a believer thinks that help pre-Christian co-workers understand that Christianity is relevant to everyday life. **During the next week share at least one faith-snap-shot with a Christian co-worker to begin to form a habit of sharing with others at work what God is doing in your life.**

A caution is in order. We don't share faith-snap-shots to explain why we *don't* do something. That'll reinforce the misconception that faith takes all the fun out of life. For example, if during a social event related to our job, someone offers us an alcoholic beverage, we shouldn't say, "I'm a Christian. I don't drink." We could just say, "I'd prefer coffee, ginger ale or cold water, thank you." Sooner or later some will want to know more about our faith. That's when we switch lures.

When people want to know more about our faith, our stories of God at work in our life should expand. We should be careful we don't tell too many at one time. If our friend has a headache, we give her two aspirin, not a whole bottle! We don't drop the whole truckload of our spiritual knowledge and experience in one sitting! In two minutes or less we explain how God has been working in our life recently. We could explain, for example, several ways God helped us when our grandmother died. We asked for grace to deal with the loss, and God gave it. **We'll take about five minutes to think about how God has been at work in our life in the last month. Then we'll roll play sharing it with each other in about two minutes (one-on-one). We'll close our sharing with an open invitation to have future spiritual conversations. We'll use alphabetical order (last name) to determine who goes first. Then we'll switch roles.**

Invite Fish to Other Schools

We can invite those receptive to spiritual things to low key outreach events sponsored by our small group or church. Here not-yet-believing co-workers can develop relationships with believers in our small group or church. The more Christians they get to know, the clearer their picture of what it means to be a Christian will be. They'll discover we're not crazy and many others believe as we do. These events could include carnivals, bowling outings, car shows, athletic events, bus trips, concerts, drama presentations, fishing trips, etc. We'll introduce our friend to believers who have similar interests. The next step is to invite our friend to events that can answer his questions and meet his needs. When we sense the time is right, we can invite her to events where she'll be challenged to commit her life to Jesus Christ. **What low key events does our small group or church have scheduled in the next three months to which we can invite our unconnected co-workers? If none, let's brainstorm events our small group could sponsor, and then develop initial plans for the first event (what, where, when and who's in charge).**

Tell "Fish" Stories to Other Fisherpersons

Fishermen are more diligent and focused in their fishing when they know someone is going to ask, "How many fish did you catch?" It puts the pressure on. The author once went fishing with a pastor who announced to his congregation that he was going fishing the following Thursday. He said, "Don't call me, and don't ask me what I caught!" One of the ways to encourage fishing at work is through small group accountability. We get what we expect and inspect. We increase the amount of fishing done at work by periodically evaluating how it's been going. Part of our Sunday school class or small group time should be spent sharing fishing stories from work. **Let's develop a strategy to evaluate in our group meetings once/month progress in spiritual receptivity among co-workers to whom we're reaching out. Next meeting we'll be asked to share with a partner who the most spiritually receptive persons are at work.**

Lesson 6

Transition to Fishin'



Volunteers should read the following paragraphs. Discuss, evaluate or respond to the material in bold print as you go.

Begin with prayer – Let’s invite the Holy Spirit to lead our group to understand and live the truth and prepare us to be a channel of blessing to others.

Vision: These lessons will equip, encourage and empower us to attract, win, and assimilate a constant stream of co-workers, friends, neighbors and relatives to Christ and our church.

Pair up exercise: We’re going to pair up and share with a partner who the most spiritually receptive persons at work are and how we’ve come to that conclusion. We’ll allow five minutes for this exercise, 2.5 minutes each.

Prayer: Let’s pray for one another’s list of lost co-workers, family and friends using first names only. We’ll swap lists (p. 9) with someone else in the group and use the 7-3 model explained in Lesson 1 to guide our praying. We’ll pray that we’ll be attractive, bold, clear, discerning, excellent, fair and wise and those we’re reaching out to will be convicted, dissatisfied and perceptive.

Objective: To learn how to transition from small talk to talking about spiritual things with those who appear to be receptive.

Be Courageous

Competence and integrity get others’ attention at work. Caring actions build bridges of trust between us and our co-workers. One more thing is essential. We need courage to speak up for Jesus. Without it, we’ll never catch any fish. Paul wrote, “Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel” (Ephesians 6:19).

Transition to the Good News

Timing is critical to fishing *and* evangelistic effectiveness. Fish bite better during certain times of the day than others. Walleyes usually feed around dawn and dusk. Days around the full moon and new moon are better than others. Spring and fall are usually better than the heat of summer. As I write this, I've just completed a week of vacation in early October. I spent parts of four days fishing on the Susquehanna River. Because of a combination of favorable conditions (water temperature and clarity and river stage), my catch rate per hour was five or six times higher than during summer. The fish were actively looking for food, but I still had to cast my lure close to them to actually catch them.

During times of stress, great problems, and upheaval, persons are more receptive to the gospel than when everything is going smoothly. Still, they must actually hear and respond to the gospel to be saved. “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). A pastor in the Eastern Regional Conference, Churches of God shared with the author that a young woman had come to him and more or less asked the Philippian jailer's question (Acts 16:30), “What must I do to be saved?” Her conversion happened in the midst of a combination of favorable fishing conditions, including the recent death of her mother. That pastor didn't have to transition to the good news of the gospel. She took the initiative. That's about as rare as a fish jumping into the boat! Almost always the believer must take the initiative to share the gospel.

Many fishermen don't make it to the stream, river or lake to fish as often as they'd like because they're preoccupied with other things—they just don't get around to it. The graphic in this lesson illustrates we have to move from the shore to the fishing boat. We don't evangelize as much as we'd like because it's hard to move from self-focus to others-focus and from small talk to God-talk.

Two Evangelistic Errors

One evangelistic error is to share the gospel before co-workers are receptive and press too hard for a “commitment” to Christ. New believers, frothing at the mouth with joy and enthusiasm, are often guilty of this error. They forget their decision to follow Christ wasn't spur of the moment, but the conclusion of a process. In their exuberance they try to catch fish with a landing net *before* they're even hooked! All they do is scare them away.

Some who have the gift of evangelism are also prone to this extreme. They pressure for a decision. Some people pray a prayer to get the evangelist off their back, but don't follow through. Their “commitment” was the evangelist's idea, not theirs. They don't own it and aren't committed to following Christ. Others pray a prayer or walk an aisle in a church and mistakenly think that makes them OK. Their life doesn't change at all. Responding to an evangelist's invitation is no substitute for following Christ as a way of life. We can't pressure people into the kingdom. We *can* make them feel dirty, but we *can't* make them want to be clean.

The second evangelistic error is to develop our relationship with a friend, relative, neighbor or co-worker, but never get around to sharing the gospel. That's a *much* bigger

pitfall than the first evangelistic error for most believers trying to have a spiritual impact among co-workers. **Are you more likely to be guilty of the first evangelistic error or the second? Explain.**

Given co-workers are becoming receptive to and interested in spiritual things, how do we usher them to the next level? We must overcome our feelings of fear and sense of incompetence in leading others to faith in Christ, or we'll never get off the shore and into the fishing boat.

Transitional Questions

Certain questions have helped the author bridge the conversation from the weather, sports, etc., to spiritual things. They should be asked at a time and place where there's privacy and time to address spiritual issues in depth.

Especially when we know someone is going through a tough time, we can ask, *"Do you feel a need to be closer to God?"* If the answer is "Yes," we can say, "Let me show you how you can be." Then we share the gospel (we'll look at the content to share in Lesson 9). The author has used this question more extensively than any other. People who are hurting usually respond positively.

"Why do you think people feel so empty, even when they have so much?" First we listen to what our co-worker has to say. Then we take the opportunity to tell how Jesus has brought meaning to our life and filled up the empty spot. After sharing our personal testimony related to finding meaning in life, we should ask, "May I share with you the first step in his doing the same for you?" If the response is positive, we share the gospel.

"Do you ever wonder if there's an overall purpose and meaning in life? If so, what do you think it is?" Again, listen first. Here's another opportunity to share your personal testimony! After doing so, ask, "May I share with you the first step in finding purpose in life?" If the response is positive, share the gospel.

"Do you think faith in Jesus Christ spoils or enriches someone's life? Why?" After listening to their response, ask, "May I share how faith has enriched my life?" If the person is receptive, share your personal testimony. Ask, "May I share with you the first step to take for Jesus Christ to enrich your life?" If the response is positive, share the gospel.

If they attend a church service with you or other kind of outreach event, ask, *"What did you think of the message?"* After listening to their response, ask, "Have you experienced the joy of knowing Christ personally?" If the answer isn't, "Yes," ask, "Would you like to?" If the response is positive, share the gospel.

We can talk about some need that's become obvious in our co-worker's life such as a lack of purpose, fear, discouragement or loneliness and share how Christ has met that need in our life. We can ask if we may explain how our co-worker could begin a personal relationship with Christ. If given permission, we share the gospel. If we aren't given permission, we try to keep the door open for a future conversation. We could say, "That's OK. Perhaps we could talk about it some other time."

Over time we can ask our co-workers questions to learn how they think about spiritual things. Usually, we ask only one during a single conversation and then listen attentively. We can ask whether they regularly attend church anywhere unless we already know they don't. On another occasion, we inquire about their spiritual beliefs, and make sure we don't argue no matter what they say. If they ask about our beliefs, we share our personal testimony. When it seems appropriate, we ask, "Who do you think Jesus is?" Sometime we should ask whether they believe in heaven and hell, maybe when either one comes up in a conversation. During the same conversation, we ask, "If you died today, to which would you go and why?"

According to an ABC News poll in 2005, 76% of Americans believe both there's a heaven *and* they're going there (abcnews.go.com/2020/Beliefs/story?id=1422658, retrieved December 10, 2007). Asking *why* persons think they're going to heaven provides insight into their spiritual understanding. Is their trust in personal goodness (often the case) or in what Christ has done on the cross? After someone has responded to this question, we could ask, "May I share with you what the Bible says is the requirement to enter heaven?" If the answer is yes, we share the gospel. If the answer is no, we try to keep the door open for a future conversation.

Let's reflect on these suggested transitions between small-talk and God-talk for a few minutes. Then we're going to practice using one or more of them. We're going to pair up and practice transitioning to talking about spiritual things. One person will play the part of a relatively moral person who doesn't attend church and thinks his good deeds outweigh his bad deeds and will get him into heaven. This person has recently lost a brother to cancer and is also experiencing financial difficulties. You're eating breakfast together during an out-of-town conference you're both attending. We'll transition into the gospel, but we won't take the time to share it during this training session. After practicing one or more transitions, we'll switch roles.

Our assignment this week is to ask a co-worker a transitional question and report back about our experience the next time we meet.

Lesson 7

Tell Your Story



Volunteers should read the following paragraphs. Discuss, evaluate or respond to the material in bold print as you go.

Begin with prayer – Let’s invite the Holy Spirit to lead our group to understand and live the truth and prepare us to be a channel of blessing to others.

Vision: These lessons will equip, encourage and empower us to attract, win, and assimilate a constant stream of co-workers, friends, neighbors and relatives to Christ and our church.

Pair up exercise: Take turns sharing what happened when you shared your transitional question with a co-worker.

Prayer: Let’s pray for one another’s list of lost co-workers, family and friends using first names only. We’ll swap lists (p. 9) with someone else in the group and use the 7-3 model explained in Lesson 1 to guide our praying. We’ll pray that we’ll be attractive, bold, clear, discerning, excellent, fair and wise and those we’re reaching out to will be convicted, dissatisfied and perceptive.

Objective: To prepare to share with someone else how Christ has made a difference in our life.

Materials: A gospel presentation is available free in a pocket-sized version from: Jack Selcher, 900 South Arlington Ave. Room 213, Harrisburg, PA 17109. 717-652-0255. e-mail jack@eccog.org. We’ll need this pocket-sized version for Lesson 9. **Who’ll make the contact to obtain this resource and order enough for everyone to have at least three copies?**

Telling Your Story

The author unexpectedly met a friend from church in a local fishing tackle store. The friend fishes frequently. He told the author about a lure he’d used the previous fall very successfully for smallmouth bass and walleye. He pointed out the lure and identified the right size and color. The author trusted him, was impressed by his testimony, and bought

several. He wouldn't have purchased them without his friend's recommendation. In his previous fishing experience he'd rarely had any success with that kind of lure. He tried it once during the summer of 2007 but didn't get a single strike on it. He didn't give up because he trusted his friend.

In early fall he tried the lure again. Within minutes he caught a fish. Soon after that he hooked and lost a very large bass. From that day until early November, he used that lure almost exclusively when he fished. He caught many nice smallmouth bass on it, including the one in the above picture.

During the fall two Church of God pastors fished with the author, one in late October and the other in early November. He told them of the success he'd enjoyed with his now favorite lure. He loaned them one, but initially it didn't work well for either of them. The author was catching fish consistently, but they weren't. A little analysis revealed their retrieve speed was too slow. When they sped it up, bass began striking their lures too.

Notice the progression. The author's church friend told him about the lure. That testimony influenced him to buy and use it. It worked. He told his pastor friends about it and demonstrated how to use it. It worked for them too. This story illustrates the life-changing potential of sharing our spiritual story with others. We tell others what Jesus means to us. He works! They ultimately receive him and tell others what he means to them. He works in their lives too! Our influence spreads in ever widening circles beyond our ability to track it. My church friend had no idea his testimony in the tackle shop would impact my two fellow pastors and who knows how many others.

Our personal experience with Christ and how he's changed our life is our most effective "lure." Perhaps we think it isn't worth tying on our line. We can't testify about deliverance from alcoholism, drug abuse, prostitution, gambling or some other nasty addiction. That's not necessary. He's freed us from addiction to going our own way, which is every human's basic problem. We don't need to have seen the risen Christ or heard his audible voice to have a story. "Then Jesus told him [Thomas], "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). He's talking about us. We haven't seen him or even a five-second mini-vision in black and white. We're "trust and obey" believers and at times fail miserably in those two basics. The fact remains that he's blessed and changed us. That's what we talk about.

Many who don't know Jesus experience life as a relentless march of unsatisfying days. They've no real love, joy, peace, purpose, hope or fulfillment now and no prospect of a better tomorrow. They chase the butterfly of good feelings and sometimes catch it, but it always escapes. Tomorrow they pursue it all over again. Such persons don't realize Christ and his church promise the purpose they've longed for. Believing our story isn't important adds to the problem.

We're going to think hard about how God has been at work in our life. We aren't yet what we want to be. We know our failures and shortcomings well. Nevertheless, we've

probably made far more progress than we realize. Writing our personal spiritual story prepares us to share it more clearly and often.

Unbelievers who live for themselves and don't have the benefit of the Holy Spirit's conviction are mostly blind to their own faults. Like kittens with our eyes open, we with new life in Christ see ourselves more clearly. That's significant progress. We have God's living water in us, even though we're cracked and leaky vessels still under construction. Our role isn't to pretend we've got it all together, but to be transparent. God gets the glory for any improvement. That improvement gets the attention of the spiritually thirsty.

Our story connects with people like us. Persons who "aren't that bad now," and have never battled alcoholism, can relate to how Christ has worked in a "not so bad" life better than in the life of a converted alcoholic.

We have to think about and write our story for it to reach its full potential to influence not-yet-believers. The first step is to pray and reflect on how God has been at work in our life. The whole process could take several hours, but the blessings that can result are beyond measure. We'll begin today by organizing our thoughts around a single theme, such as how our purpose or values are different than they used to be. We don't tell our church story. Unbelievers don't care that we've assumed positions of increasing authority in the church since our conversion. That doesn't scratch where they itch. We must explain how Christ makes a difference in everyday life.

To communicate our story effectively, we'll organize it into three sections:

- 1) What our life was like before knowing Jesus personally.
- 2) How we came to know Christ, explained clearly enough that others will know how to receive him too.
- 3) How receiving Christ has changed how we relate to God, others, and ourselves.

The author's testimony illustrates how we might organize our own. When we read it, we'll look for the dominant theme.

"Spiritual things were on the backburner. I was taken to church three times a week for at least twelve years, but other things were more important. Outside the church building I hardly ever thought about God, rarely prayed voluntarily, and never read the Bible on my own. My purpose was to excel in sports and my studies to win the love and acceptance of others. I set goals in both areas and sacrificed a lot to attain them, but discovered that achieving them never brought lasting satisfaction. The thought of dying scared me, and a cloud of guilt hung over me. I believed in heaven but had no assurance I'd go there when I died.

In my church I often heard that Jesus had died on a cross to pay the penalty for my moral and spiritual imperfections. I knew I wasn't perfect, but I didn't understand how Jesus' death solved the problem. I pictured it as a down payment on my passage to heaven. I thought I had to make regular payments by the good things I did.

During the fall of 1968, as a result of hearing 1 John 5:11-12 quoted, I understood I didn't have to make any payments at all. Jesus had paid the penalty for my moral imperfections in full. Those verses say: 'And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.' [It was actually quoted to me from the King James Version]. That evening in my dorm room, I trusted in Jesus' sacrifice alone to give me right standing with God and invited him into my life. That evening was a turning point. Because God loved and accepted me as I was, I wanted to do what pleased him. Little by little, love for God displaced fear of God as a dominant motivator in my spiritual life.

My fear of death greatly diminished. God lifted the weight of guilt for my moral failures when I trusted Jesus' death as payment in full. I had assurance I'd go to heaven because I trusted Jesus to keep his promise to take me there.

The new life I received wouldn't allow me to relate to God or others in the same old ways. I remember feeling a twinge of conscience after talking in a negative way about people who weren't present—something I'd done repeatedly for years without thinking twice about it. God convicted me that my language needed some attention. My words (& % @ # !) were a symptom of the anger and desire for control that swirled within me. Gradually I saw improvement. Little by little God's love for and acceptance of me freed me to love and accept others. I gradually developed a strong desire to serve others that I didn't have before the fall of 1968. My goal became to know Jesus better and to help others know him too. Working toward that goal brought fulfillment I'd never known when I was doing my own thing."

The central theme is how the author's life purpose and values changed through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Our testimony is our spiritual autobiography, as unique as our fingerprints. To share it with others effectively we should memorize the major points.

Our story can impact others whose hearts the Holy Spirit has prepared. Not only will it influence them, but sharing it will also stoke our own spiritual fires by reminding us anew how much Christ has done.

Here is a guide to help us organize and write our story:

Describe your life before you met Christ. What was important to you? What motivated you? What were your goals? What problems did you face? What place did self occupy in your plans and decisions? Remember to organize your thoughts around a dominant theme.

Describe how you received Christ clearly enough so that someone else would know how to receive him. The basic content you need to communicate is that to become a Christian you needed to know that you were a sinner and that Christ died for your sins. You had to turn from going your way to his and invite him into your life as your Forgiver and Leader.

How has your life changed since receiving Christ? What is important to you? What motivates you? What are your goals and problems and how do you deal with them? How do you live for Christ, etc?

Before the next meeting we'll finish writing our personal testimony and type it if possible. We're aiming for about 600 words (or two to three minutes if it were read aloud). We'll memorize the basic ideas (not word for word) and prepare to share it with a partner at our next meeting.

Lesson 8

Wait for a Bite



Volunteers should read the following paragraphs. Discuss, evaluate or respond to the material in bold print as you go.

Begin with prayer – Let’s invite the Holy Spirit to lead our group to understand and live the truth and prepare us to be a channel of blessing to others.

Vision: These lessons will equip, encourage and empower us to attract, win, and assimilate a constant stream of co-workers, friends, neighbors and relatives to Christ and our church.

Pair up exercise: Let’s pair up and practice sharing our testimony with our partner. The one who got up earliest this morning goes first!

Prayer: Let’s pray for one another’s list of lost co-workers, family and friends using first names only. We’ll swap lists (p. 9) with someone else in the group and use the 7-3 model explained in Lesson 1 to guide our praying. We’ll pray that we’ll be attractive, bold, clear, discerning, excellent, fair and wise and those we’re reaching out to will be convicted, dissatisfied and perceptive.

Objective: To understand and apply active waiting to evangelism.

Active Waiting

Someone defined fishing as a jerk at one end of the line waiting for a jerk at the other end! The author [hereafter referred to by the first person] *resembles* that remark! The picture suggests fishing is a passive activity, with the fisherman waiting quietly and patiently for a fish to find and take the bait. For many people, fishing is a low energy activity that includes reading a book while waiting for a bite. There’s nothing wrong with that approach, but I prefer *active waiting*. Sometimes I cast and retrieve a lure 120 or more times per hour. I keep moving. I’m waiting for a bite, but I’m not passively soaking my lure in one spot the whole hour. I don’t expect fish to come to my lure. I take it to them. My style is high energy. Even on my best fishing days on the Susquehanna River, I know it’ll take an average of 40 casts to catch one fish. At the end of the day I’m tired,

and my back usually hurts. Why do I fish that way? My chances of catching fish are much better if I can tempt many fish an hour as compared to far fewer (and maybe none at all) if the bait is sitting and soaking where there aren't any fish.

Patience isn't inactivity. "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). The Lord is both patient and at work in the lives of people who don't yet know him. "When he [Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). God patiently, actively waits for them to respond to the conviction the Holy Spirit brings.

We shouldn't confuse patience with inactivity and twiddle our thumbs while the months pass like guard rails on the highway at 70 miles per hour, waiting for a co-worker to decide to follow Jesus. We pray. We demonstrate love in practical ways. We share what God is doing in our life. We look for signs of God at work. We team up with others in the evangelistic task. We engage in active waiting! **Let's be as specific as we can as we share what we could do to make our waiting more active for and bring Christ to at least one co-worker.**

Tag-Team Fishing

One day my dad and I were fishing from a canoe on the Susquehanna River near the Rockville Bridge (Marysville, PA). I was in the front of the canoe, and my father was in the back. Since it's easier to steer the canoe from the back, we'd developed a routine to free our lures when they hooked the river bottom. If I snagged my lure on the bottom, my dad would paddle me to the offending rock, and I'd pull the lure free. If his lure wedged under a rock, he'd hand me his rod and reel and we'd repeat the same drill. Either way I didn't have to paddle! My dad's lure got stuck on a snag that morning, and he handed his rod and reel to me as usual. The only difference -- after he handed his outfit to me, the "snag" began to move. He'd hooked a 33-inch carp, and neither he nor the fish realized it. After I began to apply pressure, the fish began to swim. It took about 15 minutes to land it on six pound breaking strength line, and two of us to do it! He hooked it and paddled after it as it made runs; I fought and landed it.

Tag Team Evangelism

Our "carp-athon" illustrates the evangelistic task. It takes more than one fisherman's input to lead someone to faith and maturity in Christ. At most 10% of believers have the spiritual gift of evangelism according to C. Peter Wagner (quoted by Christian Schwarz in *Natural Church Development*, p. 35). That means there's a 90% chance we don't, but a 100% chance we can still make a significant contribution to sharing and living out the gospel.

Paul wrote, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers..." (1 Corinthians 3:6-9a).

The seed represents the gospel that's both declaration and demonstration. Paul did more than preach to the Corinthians the way to be saved from the penalty of sin. "...Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God" (Acts 18:11). The gospel is more than the simple message of how to become a child of God through repentance from sin and faith in Christ's sacrifice in our place. It's the declaration *and* demonstration that real life (eternal life) is found only in Christ. In our workplace the challenge is for us to demonstrate Christ's life and share how others can embrace it for themselves. Without demonstration, declaration falls on deaf ears. We don't have to do it all by ourselves, but we've an important part to play.

Notice the last part of 1 Corinthians 3:5 says the "Lord has assigned to each his task." We all have major strengths that contribute to building up Christ's body. "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4:11-12). These strengths are connected to the Lord's assigned tasks. **Let's discuss our initial understanding of our role in bringing our co-workers to faith in Christ and how the people in our small group (or believers at work) could work together as a team to increase our effectiveness. Be as specific as possible.**

Active Waiting Evangelism

Gardeners break up the soil, remove stones, plant, irrigate, fertilize, cultivate, weed, spray and harvest with lots and lots of waiting interspersed. These "active waiting" activities contribute to the abundance of the harvest. Those with a "green thumb" provide favorable conditions for an abundant harvest! Evangelism is similar.

The time it takes individuals to understand and respond to the gospel varies considerably. Some never respond positively, "...for not everyone has faith" (2 Thessalonians 3:2). Among those who "get it," hardly anyone does so immediately. Some take longer than others. On average, persons need to hear the gospel about seven times before they receive Christ. The author heard it more than 1000 times over 15 years before it penetrated his 7-millimeter-thick skull! Many people in his church and he himself would have concluded he got it long before that, but he didn't. He was a fruitless, baptized, pew-potato-member of his church before he really understood and responded to the gospel. When it comes to conversion, people are like plants. We can harvest spinach 45 days after planting. Tomatoes mature in 65-80 days. Sweet corn takes 75-90 days. Banana and papaya trees produce a year after they're planted. Guava takes 2-3 years. Avocados don't bear fruit for 7-10 years. **Let's share how long it took us to become a follower of Christ (from first exposure to the gospel to initial commitment). Then we'll discuss how our stories should temper our expectations of how quickly our co-workers will respond to Christ.**

In an informal survey in Eastern Regional Conference churches, the author asked persons to raise their hand if they received Christ as Lord and Savior the first time they heard the gospel. Of about 1,500 persons polled, only two said they did. Perhaps those two misunderstood the question! The survey results shouldn't surprise us. We didn't

receive Christ the first time we heard the gospel either. Evangelism is a process. It's more than an event where the unsaved fidget in pews. It includes lunches together with seekers who are wrestling with life's burdens. It's babysitting an unsaved co-worker's child so he and his wife can have an evening out together. It's spending time with a co-worker in the woods, fields or streams hunting or fishing together. It's going to the mall or watching the Super Bowl together. It's helping him move. It's getting close enough to influence her. There's no harvesting without sowing and watering. Most of the work of evangelism isn't done by those who lead people to Christ, but by friends and relatives who prepare the way by taking Christ to people. They're channels through whom Christ's love flows. The more persons in our church are involved in sowing and watering, the more God is able to make grow, and the greater the harvest. Praying for the salvation of our pre-Christian friends and relatives and demonstrating caring by meeting their needs is a vital part of the evangelistic process. It's not enough to bring them to Christ, but they probably won't come to Christ without it.

God uses a sequence of events and experiences, like a set of steps, to bring persons to himself. We probably won't help someone take the first step in their spiritual journey toward a relationship with Christ (the first exposure to the gospel) or the last step (receiving Jesus), but one of the middle steps. Moving someone one step closer to a commitment to Christ through sharing a testimony or performing a loving action is *very* significant.

Irresistible Evangelism by Steve Sjogren, Dave Ping and Doug Pollock, published by Group in 2004, describes evangelism as a process. It's like golf. How close the ball is to the hole (someone's closeness to receiving Christ) determines the "club" we should use. The "Roman Road" or the "Four Spiritual Laws" is like a putter to move to Christ those already close to a commitment. The "Four Spiritual Laws" isn't the right tool for an atheist. That's like using a putter to hit the ball off the tee! Where unbelievers are with respect to Christ determines whether evangelism takes the form of active kindness (for those farthest away), active friendship, active wondering, or active sharing (for those closest to Christ). Except for active wondering, these four are self-explanatory. Active wondering is asking questions to get to know another person's beliefs and values, and then listening attentively for his/her response. We could ask a question such as, "I wonder what you think your life's purpose is?" **How does this golf analogy relate to active waiting in evangelism? How, for example, does active waiting for someone who doesn't believe there is a God differ from active waiting for someone who's a Christmas and Easter church attender, but not a believer?**

Lesson 9

Land the Fish



Volunteers should read the following paragraphs. Discuss, evaluate or respond to the material in bold print as you go.

Begin with prayer – Let’s invite the Holy Spirit to lead our group to understand and live the truth and prepare us to be a channel of blessing to others.

Vision: These lessons will equip, encourage and empower us to attract, win, and assimilate a constant stream of co-workers, friends, neighbors and relatives to Christ and our church.

Prayer: Let’s pray for one another’s list of lost co-workers, family and friends using first names only. We’ll swap lists (p. 9) with someone else in the group and use the 7-3 model explained in Lesson 1 to guide our praying. We’ll pray that we’ll be attractive, bold, clear, discerning, excellent, fair and wise and those we’re reaching out to will be convicted, dissatisfied and perceptive.

Objective: To learn how to share our faith clearly and ask for a response.

The Way Home

Only landed fish count! When the author directed Camp Ontario in the early 1990s, the campers competed to catch the biggest walleye during the week. During the last day, on the last trolling pass, when the author was within fifteen seconds of calling it a day, a walleye struck his lure. A hooked walleye shakes its head from side to side. When its head is above water, this shaking often results in an eleventh hour unhooking. That’s exactly what happened, except his fishing partner was the fastest netter in Ontario that day. In quick succession, the fish came part way out of the water, the lure flew, and his partner netted the walleye. Bang, bang, bang, and the biggest walleye of the week was in the boat. As the author recalls, that walleye later went into the ministry! It’s always too early to give up on a co-worker’s coming to Christ.

Essentially, the gospel includes two things to know and two things to do. *The first thing to know is that we're sinners because we can't measure up to the moral standard Jesus set when he walked on earth.* "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). *The second thing to know is that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and rose from the grave on the third day, showing God was satisfied with that payment.* "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:3-6). *The first thing to do is repent or turn from our own self-centered path in life to go God's way.* "'The time has come,' he [Jesus] said, 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!'" (Mark 1:15). *The second thing to do is to invite Jesus Christ into our life to be our personal Forgiver and Leader.* The Bible describes that decision as receiving Christ. "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

We'll read through *Connecting with God* as a group. Then we'll pair up and one of the partners will play the role of a spiritually open co-worker and the other will share the gospel. The one who shares will use a transitional question as a bridge. For example, "Do you feel the need to be closer to God?" If the response is positive, "Let me show you how you can be." Then that partner will share *Connecting with God*. After one person in the pair has shared, we'll switch roles.


If we have time, we'll use a different transitional question and partner and share again. Each of us will take a turn sharing and a turn playing the role of the unconnected co-worker.

With our partner, we'll also practice the two things to know and two things to do quick summary of the gospel.

This gospel presentation is available free in a pocket-sized version from: Jack Selcher, 900 South Arlington Ave. Room 213, Harrisburg, PA 17109. 717-652-0255. e-mail jack@ercog.org.

CONNECTING WITH GOD


1. MAN'S ORIGINAL CONDITION

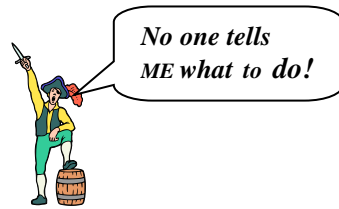
 In the beginning man lived in perfect harmony with God and carried out His will flawlessly (Genesis 1-2).

2. SIN DESTROYED PERFECT HARMONY

Man and woman deliberately defied God's command and chose their own way. (Genesis 3).



SIN Is Living For MYSELF

Isaiah 53:6 - We all, like  have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. SIN is a rebellious attitude against the Captain of our “ship”:



SIN Is Universal

Romans 3:23 - For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

 is the moral . Every person on earth falls short of his standard.

3. BECAUSE OF SIN WE ARE:

Separated from God

Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear (Isaiah 59:1-2).

Spiritually Dead

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1).

Already Condemned

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son (John 3:18).



Sin separates us from God

4. JESUS CHRIST IS GOD’S ONLY PROVISION FOR OUR SIN

Jesus Is God’s Provision

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).



Died



Buried



Risen!

There's No Other Way

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).



JESUS IS THE  BACK TO PERFECT HARMONY WITH GOD.

5. WE RECEIVE GOD'S PROVISION [JESUS] BY REPENTANCE AND FAITH.

Mark 1:15 - "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

a. Repentance means turning from self-centered to God-centered living.



God, I'm willing to do what YOU want!

b. Faith means receiving Christ, God's provision for our sin.

- 1) To believe in Christ means to receive him.
- 2) But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name (John 1:12).
- 3) Revelation 3:20 pictures receiving Christ: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me."

Only you can open the door of your life to Jesus Christ.

Opening the door means:

1. Being willing to follow Jesus instead of your own selfish desires [Repent]. God gives the desire and ability to obey.
2. Believing that God forgives you, not because of how good you are, but because Jesus paid 100% of the penalty for your sins on the cross [Believe the gospel].

Have you opened the door of your life to Jesus in this way?

You can through the following prayer:

LORD JESUS, THANK YOU FOR DYING ON THE CROSS IN MY PLACE AND TAKING MY SIN, DEATH, AND JUDGMENT UPON YOURSELF. I OPEN THE DOOR OF MY LIFE TO YOU. I WANT YOU TO COME INTO MY LIFE AND TAKE CONTROL. THANK YOU FOR FORGIVING MY SINS AND MAKING ME A CHILD OF GOD. I WANT TO BE LIKE YOU. AMEN.

Does that prayer express your heart's desire? If it does, would you like to use it to invite Jesus to come into your life as your Forgiver and Leader?

The moment you open the door to Jesus you receive his life. You are born again. You can know that Jesus came into your life. What does he promise he will do in Revelation 3:20 if you open the door? You can take Jesus at his word. Nothing is more certain! Don't expect a wonderful feeling inside. God honors faith. Don't depend on feelings. In 1 John 5:11-12 God promises eternal life to all who have Jesus, the Son.

If you have Jesus, you have eternal life. Take God's word for it!

CHRISTIAN GROWTH BASICS

1. Read the Bible daily. Begin with Matthew. Write briefly in a notebook what you've learned and will try to apply to your life (1 Peter 2:2).
2. Pray daily asking Jesus to control you and show you how to apply the Bible to your life to make you more like him. Pray about all your concerns (Philippians 4:6-7).
3. Every Sunday attend Sunday school and worship (Hebrews 10:24-25; Luke 4:16). Join a discipleship group in your church.
4. Share your time, talents, and treasures cheerfully. Jesus wants to serve others through you. Tell others how you received him and the difference he has made in your life.
5. Moment by moment yield to the control of the Holy Spirit of Christ who lives in you.

Lesson 10

Conserve the Catch



Introduction

Volunteers should read the following paragraphs. Discuss, evaluate or respond to the material in bold print as you go.

Begin with prayer – Let’s invite the Holy Spirit to lead our group to understand and live the truth and prepare us to be a channel of blessing to others.

Vision: These lessons will equip, encourage and empower us to attract, win, and assimilate a constant stream of co-workers, friends, neighbors and relatives to Christ and our church.

Prayer: Let’s pray for one another’s list of lost co-workers, family and friends using first names only. We’ll swap lists (p. 9) with someone else in the group and use the 7-3 model explained in Lesson 1 to guide our praying. We’ll pray that we’ll be attractive, bold, clear, discerning, excellent, fair and wise and those we’re reaching out to will be convicted, dissatisfied and perceptive.

Objective: To conserve the fruit of evangelism.

What Smells?

In 1987 the author’s father, brother, nephew and he booked a fly-in fishing trip to Gouin Reservoir in Quebec. It was the best fishing they’ve ever experienced. They caught numerous northern pike and walleye in a loon-serenaded wilderness setting. At that time the walleye possession limit was ten per person. They packed their forty walleyes (about eighty pounds) in two coolers. They had a lot of fish, but not a lot of ice! To make a long story stinkin’ short, *all* the fish spoiled. When they opened the coolers at home, a less than pleasant odor assaulted them. All their work was in vain.

What Works?

Because the author likes to eat fish, he pays attention to conserving the catch. *It doesn't happen by accident.* Fish die and decompose rather quickly. When he anticipates catching fish he wants to keep, he prepares by taking a cooler containing two gallon-sized ice blocks. He makes them by freezing water in plastic juice containers. When he catches a fish he wants to keep, he puts it on ice immediately. He fillets the fish as soon as he gets home. He places the fillets in a freezer bag which he fills with water so no air contacts the fillets. The fillets are frozen in ice. This procedure prevents freezer burn. He's eaten fish fillets that have been frozen for more than two years that didn't noticeably lose their quality. *Conserving the catch doesn't happen by accident.*

Where'd They Go?

Conserving the evangelistic catch doesn't happen by accident. Winning even one person to Christ requires an enormous expenditure of resources. In financial terms alone, without considering time and energy, the churches in the Eastern Regional Conference in 2006 spent a total of about 20 million dollars and reported 678 conversions. That means the cost per conversion was about \$29,500.00! How many of these converts are regularly attending our churches twelve months after conversion? Only God knows, but the tendency is for them to slip away big time! A church of the Nazarene pastor in Anaheim, California, Craig Rench, has calculated that in American evangelical churches only 2 to 16 percent of new converts are still in the church one year after conversion. If that's even close to being correct, that's a frightening statistic! Our goal isn't decisions for Christ but fully devoted followers of Christ. *Conserving the catch doesn't happen by accident.* **Who was converted through the ministry of our church during the last year? We may have to ask our pastor to find out. Are they still attending? What strategies do we use to enfold new converts into the life of our church?**

Velcro Principles

1. Do Immediate Follow-up

Satan has his own follow-up program. Like a lion, he preys on the young in the faith because they're easy targets. "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). He visits *every* recent convert. He *never* forgets. He's *never* too busy. He doesn't put it off. He always arrives within 24 hours. You can count on it. He comes with his own bad news agenda.

He turns the focus from God's love, forgiveness, promises, grace, and faithfulness to the new believer's sinfulness, unworthiness, and weakness. "Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them" (Mark 4:15). His goal is to take away the word and make new believers doubt their salvation. He whispers, "Do you think God really forgave you for what you've done? Hardly! You'll never be able to live like a Christian. Don't bother trying." If he can't shake up their assurance of salvation, he encourages isolation from other believers. "You don't have to go to church to be a Christian! You

don't need more demands. You're already too busy!" He knows those who never connect with a church won't do any serious damage to the kingdom of darkness. They won't bear fruit. They'll be as useless as a big toe or little finger that isn't connected to the body.

Since Satan has his own follow-up program, we need one too. We must do follow-up within 24-hours. Then we won't give the devil much time to steal away the word already sown and to build his bad news case. When we meet, we can answer questions and review assurance of salvation. We emphasize the importance of trusting God's character and word, not feelings, regarding salvation. We should set up another time to meet within the next week to talk about the basics of maturing in Christ. If someone else will become a mentor to the new believer, we should take that person with us on our first follow-up visit and introduce him or her. Males mentor males, and females, other females.

Who'll be responsible to do initial follow-up of persons who receive Christ through our small group's outreach?

2. Pray

We must pray for new believers. A lot is at stake. "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4). Satan doesn't fear our abilities, gifts, discipline or organization. When our strength is pitted against his, it's like a midget basketball team playing the NBA champions! We don't have a chance. However, when we pray, he trembles because he knows we're accessing God's power and infinite resources. Prayer moves God's hand. That's what he fears.

Prayer is most consistent when it's organized and most effective when it's corporate. Effective organization transforms good intentions into effective intercession. Certainly those who lead others to Christ should pray for them. If the evangelizer or the evangelized is part of our small group, we'll pray for that new convert. Prayer groups that meet regularly in the church could pray for new converts, but someone must be responsible to update them on who they are. Group prayer increases prayer power. "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20).

Specifically, how can we pray for new believers? We can pray for God's protection from Satan's attacks, humility, surrender to God's leadership, discipline to spend daily time with God, new friends in the church, the fruit of the Spirit, fruitful witness, personal growth, obedience, a renewed mind, joy, answered prayer, lasting fruit, thinking about and seeking the things above, considering himself/herself dead to the old way of living, putting on the full armor of God, growing trust in God and his word, wisdom, knowledge of God, the hope of God's calling, the surpassing greatness of God's power, knowledge of God's will, steadfastness, patience, a thankful heart, and a commitment to understanding and living the truth. **What strategies could we employ to pray for new**

believers in our church? Who'll be responsible to get their names? How often will we pray for them?

3. Mentor

A new believer needs a spiritual mother or father for at least eight months (males with males, females with females, roughly matching them age-wise, if possible). These spiritual parents should meet with their mentoring partners weekly. The first meeting covers the basics of the faith. Two resources you could use are the *Running to Win* booklet and the *Running to Win Series* by Jack Selcher, available through the ERC office (900 South Arlington Ave. Suite 213, Harrisburg, PA 17109). The booklet briefly covers Assurance of Salvation, Daily Time with God, Church Attendance, Jesus Christ Is Your New Leader, Obedience, Reading the Bible, Prayer Pointers and Forgiveness. It would be helpful to have a supply of both the booklet and series on hand. The person who'll make the initial follow-up visit should give a copy of the *Running to Win* booklet to the new believer at the time of commitment to Christ, ask him/her to read it, and make an appointment to get together the next day to review assurance of salvation. If the spiritual parent will be someone else, that person should also go along. You can download the *Running to Win Series* from www.ercog.org (Click Forms and Downloads/Resources/Discipleship/Books 1-4).

The following goals and agenda for mentoring new believers are taken from *Becoming an Enthusiastic Church* (pp. 45-46) by Jack Selcher. They're only suggestive and might need to be adapted for each individual.

Mentoring Goals for New Believers

1. Has assurance of salvation (*Running to Win* booklet).
2. Has read the *Running to Win* booklet and shared any questions with mentor.
3. Has completed the *Running to Win Series*.
4. Daily prays and reads the Bible (beginning with Matthew), and keeps a devotional journal that includes date, Scripture read, life applications, any questions to ask the mentor, and any insights from prayer time. Use the Devotional Journal in "Starting Fast" in the *Running to Win Series*.
5. Regularly attends and participates in a small group in the church.
6. Regularly attends and participates in the worship service.
7. Can name at least six friends in the church.
8. Has written a three- to five-minute personal testimony, memorized the basic ideas, and shared them with the mentor, another Christian, and at least two persons who aren't believers yet.
9. Has been baptized.
10. Participates in the ordinances of the church.

Estimated length of mentoring relationship—eight months

Mentoring Agenda for New Believers

Pray—Pray at the beginning of the meeting asking the Lord to bless your time; pray when you need special wisdom or power to deal with a decision or problem; pray at the end of the meeting for power to do what you've planned.

Listen—The new believer shares victories and defeats since the last meeting and specific problems. The mentor helps provide biblical solutions to these problems.

Plan—How will all ten mentoring goals be achieved within eight months? What strategies will the one being mentored use? What help is needed from the mentor?

Review—Review practical applications of the lesson assigned the previous week from the *Running to Win Series*, memory verses, and practical applications written during daily devotions.

Assign—Assign the next lesson in the *Running to Win Series* after the previous lesson is mastered.

Minister Together—Demonstrate how to walk with Jesus while ministering to others.

Report—Report to your mentoring coordinator at least quarterly. Share joys, concerns, problems, questions, and needed training.

How can we make sure a mentoring program for new believers in our church is in place and effective?

4. Involve in a Small Group

Small groups provide the relational glue that holds new believers in the church. The best small group is a new believer's class where everyone is at the same stage of spiritual development. If we don't have enough new believers to conduct such a class, we'll enfold them into a group that's newly forming. If no new group is available, we'll include them in an existing group that will nurture them. Developing friendships with others in the church is a key goal of small group involvement. The more friends a new believer has in the church, the less likely he'll walk out the back door, never to return.

How can we make our small group a more nurturing environment for new believers?

5. Find a Suitable Ministry

Most people want their lives to make a difference. New believers can make a mark immediately through evangelism. They usually have many relationships with persons who aren't yet believers and overflowing zeal to share how others can find life in Christ.

Who'll be responsible to train and mobilize new believers to do evangelism?

A lack of spiritual maturity limits the number of suitable ministries for new believers. If ministries are divided into ministries of the word and ministries of service, with the exception of evangelism, at least for the first year new believers will fit best in service ministries while they're discovering and developing their spiritual gifts.

**Who in our church is responsible to match new believers with suitable ministries?
What's their strategy?** You may have to ask the pastor.