

FISHERS OF MEN // Going Fishing

20 years ago, when I encountered Jesus, my life changed forever. But before that, I was as lost as you can be. I'd spent almost eight years of my life desperately trying to find anything that would bring some kind of lasting fulfillment, meaning, purpose, or pleasure in life. I would try to act like I was just a happy kid, but what was really going on under the surface was I was totally, empty, sick, lonely, and desperate.

The first presentation of the gospel I'd ever heard was through a Christian drama team that came to the inpatient rehab program I was in when I was 17 years old. A few friends sent me my first Bible when I was in a year-long wilderness program in Washington. Not knowing what to do with the Bible, I started reading the book of Job.

About a year later, on my college campus, after I'd stumbled back into a life of addiction, I joined a Bible study because I wanted to learn more about God, and I drilled the group with all kinds of questions about all the things I could get away with and still be considered a "Christian." The Bible study leader told me one day, "Rob, if you ever decide to give your life to Jesus, let me know because we want to throw a party for you."

Another group on campus handed me a Bible one day and had a very kind and thoughtful conversation with me about God. They were curious about me and about my life. And while all of this was happening, my life continued to spiral out of control deeper and deeper into addiction. I was sick. One night, I knelt down in my dorm room and I prayed, *"Jesus, I don't even know if you're real, but if you are, would you save me? Rescue me from my sin, my selfishness, my emptiness, loneliness, my shame, my addiction. I don't even know if you're real, but if you are, would you rescue me?"*

One month later, I met a couple who gave me a picture of what it looks like to follow Jesus with your whole life. And I was all in. But I need to tell you, every one of those steps along the way, every one of those awkward conversations about Jesus, was another seed being planted. The Bible study leader, the people handing out Bibles, the gospel presentation in rehab, every single one of those encounters was a seed being planted. Slowly, over years of time, God got a hold of me, He rescued me, made me a new creation, and gave me a brand-new life.

Thank God for followers of Jesus who saw me as someone that God loved—someone that God wanted to save. They looked on me, not with hatred, and anger, and judgment because of my sin, but with mercy and compassion, with grace and kindness, as a person made in the image of God that needed someone to love them, care about them, to believe in them, and invest in them.

Every single one of us, to one degree or another, have needed from someone else. Someone to see us not for the sin we struggle with today but for the person we could become if God got a hold of their life. Every single one of us have people we're connected to that desperately need that from us. People that are far from God. People that are lonely, and hurting, people that have walked away from God who need to know that God hasn't walked away from them.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus had just healed a man, and right after, He calls Matthew, a tax collector, to follow Him. Jesus goes to the tax collector's house for dinner and invites a bunch of other "questionable" people over and throws a little party. The religious leaders witnessed this happening and were very offended. They couldn't believe that Jesus would be spending time with these kinds of people. Jesus hears this and His response would have been unbelievably controversial.

Mark 2:17, "And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.'"

Jesus, in His own words, says, "*I came not for the people who assume that they're righteous. I came for the sick, for sinners. I came not for the people who have it all together, I came to seek and to save the lost.*"

And thank God for it. Maybe today, you have this haunting sense that something is missing. You know there's something more to life than what you're experiencing today. Today might be the very day you decide to pray a simple prayer like I did. "Jesus if you're real, will you save me?" I promise you, He did it for me, He'll do it for you.

Today, we're beginning a series called Fishers of Men. In Matthew 4 and 28, Jesus extends a simple invitation and has unbelievably profound implications not only for His earliest followers. But to every single follower of Christ alive today, including you and me.

Matthew 4:18-20, "While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.' Immediately they left their nets and followed him."

After this moment, for the next several years, Peter and Andrew and many others would follow Jesus. They would watch Him and learn what He meant by this. After His death and resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples and tells them:

Matthew 28:19-20, "'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

The first invitation that Jesus extends, and the last command that Jesus gives, is to bring the good news to everyone, everywhere. To bring the good news of Jesus and His Kingdom to lost, broken, and hurting people that don't yet know Him.

I would argue that one of the greatest indicators that we're actually following Jesus is that we have a heart, a burden for people who aren't Christians. That we care about lost people that are going to spend not only their life here on earth not knowing the beauty, the sheer joy of a relationship with the God, but an eternity separated from Him.

What's incredible is that God's plan to reach lost people, to bring back those that are wandering, and those who don't yet know Him, was and still is the local church. Ordinary people trying to follow Jesus together. God's plan to reach the world is by empowering ordinary people like Peter, Andrew, James, John, Matthew... and ordinary people like you and me for an extraordinary mission. To take the gospel to the ends of the earth, to become fishers of men, and to make disciples of all nations. Never in the history of the world has a more important mission been given to a less qualified group of people.

So, what does it mean to be a fisher of men? The first thing I want to talk about is the heart of Jesus' mission, the heart to reach lost people, the heart the church, the heart of fishers of men.

Mark 2:1-5, "And when He returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that He was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no more

room, not even at the door. And He was preaching the word to them. And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'"

Before Jesus heals the man, which He eventually does, He meets this guy's biggest need, which is the forgiveness of sin.

Some Christians really care about reaching people that have never encountered Christ. Or maybe you think that it's the pastor's job to lead people to Christ and that you have no role to play. Or maybe you're too caught up in your own world, you just don't think about people that are far from God. Or, if as a follower of Jesus, you don't actually care about the lost. You're not praying for anyone to come to know Christ, you're not burdened for people that don't know how good He is and what He can do in their life, and it's been a long time since you brought anyone with you to church because it's just not on your radar. And if that's you today, I don't want to guilt you into caring for people. But I do want to say this: If you know what Jesus has done for you, if you see what He's saved you from, and you've been changed by the gospel, you will carry a burden to see lost people encounter Jesus. It is one of the clearest indicators that you actually understand what Christ has done for you.

Here are two thoughts that every Christ follower ought to do in order to fulfill Jesus' invitation to become fishers of men.

1. CARRY BURDENS

Mark 2:3, "And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic carried by four men."

They didn't ignore the paralyzed man. They didn't judge the paralytic and say, "*Oh he must be suffering because of his own horrible choices. He deserves what He's getting....*" No, they cared enough to get involved in His life and said, "*Even if we have to carry for miles to get you there, we're going to get involved in your life and do whatever it takes to get you to Jesus.*"

If you struggle with sharing your faith, one of the strangest things to people outside of the church is our silence.

A December 2021 Evangelism Explosion study conducted by Lifeway Research found that:

- Two-thirds of Americans said they were “open or very open to having a conversation about the Christian faith with a friend.”
- 40 percent of Americans said they “wouldn’t ever think about faith on their own if a friend or family member didn’t bring it up.”
- Despite an apparent openness to faith conversations by most people, 60 percent of Americans said that “many of their friends who claim to be Christians rarely talk about their faith.”

“Lost people are more amazed at our silence than offended by our message.”

- Alvin Reid

Sometimes, like the people gathered in the house around Jesus, we’re so caught up in doing our own Christian thing that we have our backs turned toward the people that most desperately need to find Him. The harsh reality is that sometimes, we’re the ones actually creating the obstacles that are keeping people from Jesus.

I want us to be a church that carries the burdens of people that are far from God. We get involved and love them. If they’re hurting, we’re with them. When they’re struggling, we get involved, we go out of our way to lighten the load, to carry the burdens of people that are far from God. And when God opens the door to share our faith, we walk through it. Not because they’re a project and we’re trying to convert them or check some religious box and move on!

No, we carry burdens and share our faith because after everything Jesus has done for us, how could we not!? The church is not a building, the church is not a brand, the church is a community of people who’ve been changed by the love of God and carry His love wherever we go.

After all He’s done for us, the only reasonable response is to surrender our whole lives to Him and help others know and follow Him. Because it’s not His desire that any should perish, but that all would come to repentance and be rescued sin by trusting Jesus with their whole life. We carry burdens. We show His love, and when God opens the door, we share about His love.

These four men literally carried this man to Jesus. They're with him, for him, taking his burden upon themselves. We're going to carry people's burdens and bring people to Jesus, not just because we want to, but after all He's done for us... we HAVE to!

2. OVERCOME OBSTACLES

These four men did whatever it took to bring this man to Jesus.

Mark 2:4, "And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay."

They pushed past the crowd carrying this man all the way up to the house where Jesus was. And when they got close and realized they couldn't get inside the house, they looked at all their other options and somehow hoisted this man on top of the roof. Now the roof would have been made of mud, thatch, and manure. And you know what that means? It means sometimes, we're going to have to dig through poop to get people to Jesus. It means things are going to get messy! And it's worth it!

Then they get through the opening in the roof and somehow, they lower this guy down right in front of Jesus, not because they just sort of want to get him to Jesus, but because they HAVE to get him to Jesus. These men don't view barriers or obstacles as a sign that God is somehow stopping them! They are doing whatever they have to do, overcoming and removing barriers to get him to Jesus. They're doing whatever it takes!

At some point, we've got to stop "going to church" and start "being the church." Because, when we recognize that Jesus didn't come for the healthy, He came for the sick, for sinners, for lost, broken, overwhelmed, lonely, tired, worn out, hurting people in desperate need of the love and grace of God... people that have never known God, people that have wandered away that have been burned by dead religion and judgmental Christians...when we recognize who He is and what He's done for us, our only reasonable response is to give our whole lives to Him and His mission to make disciples of all nations, to do whatever it takes to carry burdens, and overcome obstacles to get people to Jesus, to become fishers of men.