



*Discovering God's gifts, purpose, and plan
that are uniquely YOU.*

21 Daily Devotionals

by John Fischer

The following daily devotional writings are from author and musician, John Fischer, and his "Catch of the Day" daily devotional (available free online at www.FischTank.com).

John's one page "Catch of the Day" devotionals are a fantastic encouragement towards helping us understand what missional living looks like where we live, work, and play. I think you'll find that the theological underpinnings and practical ministry applications will be of great refreshment and inspiration to your soul! Read and enjoy!

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Catch of the Day

Being a Missionary Without Being One

by John Fischer

You are where you are for a reason. Your vocation, your neighbors, your community and your many associations are a world you inhabit to which you were sent. Every one of us has a sphere of influence that involves at least one other person and that makes us eternally significant.



If you ever heard about God sending people to the mission field and assumed everyone like you who didn't go are somehow without a mission, you assumed wrong. There is absolutely no difference between you and me and Joe Missionary heading out to some South American jungle. In fact, in many environments we can accomplish more than a missionary can because people see a missionary coming and say "Look, here comes a missionary!" and whatever they think of missionaries is immediately predisposed upon you regardless of who you are. People also excuse a missionary's faith because that is what missionaries are supposed to have. They probably wouldn't ask a missionary a whole lot of questions about their faith unless they were really seeking God.

I guess I'm thinking about all the people, who, for whatever reason, are not seeking God, but who might be interested in meeting Him if they knew He wasn't part of a missionary's agenda.

Contrast this to being just a regular guy. See, if you are just a regular guy, someone might say, "Look here comes a regular guy," and treat you like they would anyone else. There are no expectations or predispositions. They see you like a normal person (which you are) and they may not be expecting you to have a strong faith in Christ (which you do), so when you end up having one and they already like you and respect you, they will have to give credence at some level to what you have to say, even if they were already pre-disposed in some way against that belief.

Don't get this wrong either. We are not surreptitious. We are not stealth bombers slipping in under the radar and waiting for the proper moment to drop our bombs on people; we are simply people with a mission who do not broadcast it. Our mission, anyway, is not offensive. It is ultimately to love people and tell them what Jesus means to us, when given the opportunity. Given, some people will find Jesus offensive no matter what we do, but if we have their respect and they are still offended, we will know for sure about the offense. I think it is probably safe to say that more people today are offended by Christians and/or Christianity than they are by Christ.

More people need to have the opportunity to be introduced to Christ. And who, but you, could have a better chance to give them that opportunity, since you are not a missionary?

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Catch of the Day

From Evangelism to Neighborliness

by John Fischer

Several of our readers have written in to share their thoughts on the paradigm shift from evangelism to neighborliness. I thought I'd share their comments then make a few of my own.

Ray wrote: "Five minutes to show that you recognize someone as a person and an individual can make that person's day. I live in a two-college town, so most are students. One way to notice someone is to ask where they are going to school and if they seem responsive, what their major is. None of this takes a Bible scholar. It only takes a minute."

And then Steven wrote: "Our churches provide lots of teaching on evangelism, which admittedly is important. I do think, however, that we need more teaching on neighborliness. Who is my neighbor and how do I love him?"

It just might be that if we were friendlier neighbors, kinder customers, more gracious hosts, that more people will end up knowing Jesus because of us.

In a fragmented society where not everyone speaks the same language, everyone understands a message of loving service. A cup of cold water offered in the name of Jesus needs no translation. In his letters to the early Christians scattered throughout Asia, the apostle Peter wanted them to have a reputation for making their towns better places in which to live. The point was to silence the critics of the gospel by the contributions Christians were making in their communities.

What if a businessman disliked Christians and then found out that the Little League coach who spent extra time instilling confidence in his son was a Christian? What if a social activist criticized Christians but kept running into them working overtime at the social agencies in town? What if a working mother put down Christians and then found that her children's favorite schoolteacher was one? What if a homosexual liked to bash Christians, and then discovered that one of them visits him regularly now that he has AIDS. What if a CEO tried to put down Christians, and then discovered a respected leader in the Chamber of Commerce is a Christian and noted philanthropist in the community?

Remember, caring for people doesn't take a Bible scholar; it only takes a minute.



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Catch of the Day

The Last Thing We Need is a Christian World

by John Fischer
11-19-08

One of the saddest developments in Christian worldview in the last few decades has been a tendency to retreat from culture, band together socially, politically, and litigiously and more and more participate in a Christian-arbitrated worldview that does not enter into dialogue with culture, but rather sets itself up against it.



None of this is in Christ's master plan to change the world. This was someone else's idea. God's will would be for Christians to take up positions throughout all segments of society making appropriate relationships built on shared values, interests and responsibilities, and through those relationships to bring the kingdom of God to the world, because we are IT – the means by which Christ is represented in the world through His Holy Spirit now that He is at the right hand of the Father in heaven, making intercession for us.

The world never needed Christian music anyway; it needs Christians making music. The world never needed Christian movies; it needs Christians in Hollywood. The world never needed Christian television; it needs Christians in television. The world never needed Christian legal counsel fighting the causes of Christians against the world – trying to litigate a Christian society over people who aren't Christians and don't want a Christian society; it needs Christians who are good lawyers, fighting causes of social justice, mercy and representing those who are too poor to have their own counsel.

And these are just a few examples. I bet you can come up with your own, and better yet, examples in which you have an influence. I'd love to see what you come up with.

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Catch of the Day

More Than Friendly

by John Fischer

In her book, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*, Temple University professor Dr. Colleen McDannell has discovered a certain kind of Christian in America who seeks to only interact with those who share their Christian beliefs and cultural lifestyle. From her study as a sociologist, she makes a number of very acute observations about this American Christian, the most telling being: "With their non-Christian neighbors they are friendly but rarely best friends."



I am well acquainted with this kind of thinking. I grew up with it. I was encouraged to be on friendly terms with non-Christians but to have only Christian friends. I'm pretty sure this was more for our protection than anything. Meanwhile, while we were learning to be good Christians, who was left to tell the others about Jesus? Unfortunately that's how we developed gospel tracks and door-to-door evangelism. Hit and run witnessing, I call it. Get in; get out; stay clean.

I have no doubt that Christ would want us to be more than just friendly to those who are not of the household of faith. He would want us to be friends. That's the way He did it when He was here. In fact his friends were quite scandalous among the religious leaders of the day. Word was, Jesus was "a friend of the worst sort of sinners" (Luke 7:34).

Being friendly is just not going to get anybody into the kingdom of heaven. Being a friend will. It takes love, patience, and longsuffering with even the most cantankerous of unbelievers for walls of resistance to break down. And it takes time. But that's what a true friendship is -- caring for someone over the long haul, and letting someone care for you, too. Friendship is always a two-way street.

It's been statistically shown that people who become Christians typically lose all regular contact with their non-Christian friends within two years. What's wrong with this picture? For brand new believers, it may be necessary for a season to stay away from former influences, but this is never to be a permanent situation.

Let's think about our neighbors today, and our work related associates, and think about how we can be more than just friendly. Think of it this way: we are the carriers of Christ. If we remain distant, we are depriving others of the opportunity to come into contact with Him. After all, Christ in you is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27) -- hope for me, hope for you, and hope for our friends. This is why being friendly just isn't good enough.

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Catch of the Day

Adventurous Living

by John Fischer

Last week's devotional titled "More Than Friendly" on being a friend to those outside the faith instead of just being friendly has created a bit of discussion.

One item is easy to clear up. A few folks interpreted "Being friendly is just not going to get anybody into the kingdom of heaven. Being a friend will," as an indication of earning one's way into heaven. My apologies for the confusion. I was speaking there of the other person's eternal state, not mine. What I meant was: I stand a greater chance of introducing someone to Jesus by being a friend than by just being friendly. (Of course there is place for being friendly, but being a friend is much more influential.)



A number of you wrote about the usual question around this topic: How close can we get to the world before the world starts to rub off on us? To this I would answer: as close as we can. Indeed, our faith needs to rub up against the world in order to be strong and get stronger. Faith that is never challenged makes for a pretty weak faith.

I have been around Christians long enough to know that keeping oneself from bad influences can easily turn into an excuse for staying away from the world because it's just too unpleasant being around people who don't believe the same things we do. I understand that old lifestyles and addictions come into play here, but those so often become excuses to stay isolated instead of barriers to overcome.

A chaplain I know at a Christian college likes to turn this question around. "How come we always default to 'the-world's-bad-influence-on-us' position? Why don't we ever think in terms of our influence in the world?" Indeed, this would seem to be closer to Christ's commissioning us as salt and light in the world (Matthew 5:13-16). God sent Christ into the world to save it (John 3:16-17), and Christ sends us into the world to tell everyone about Him (John 17:18).

Remember, it's not about us. And since it's not about us, we need to get over whatever it is that is keeping us from being in the world and becoming friends with those who need Jesus. And I think Jesus can help with this. In fact, He is standing by with all the resources of heaven to keep us in His hand, and to get us to the place where we can reach out in love to those He came to save.

"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world," Christ prayed, "but that you protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15).

Apparently, God would rather protect us in harm's way than remove us to a safe place. How about that for adventure?

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Catch of the Day

Christians in Babylon

by John Fischer

One of the most well-known Bible stories -- right up there with David and Goliath, and Jonah and the whale -- is the story of Daniel in the lion's den. It's the story of how Daniel gained favor within the upper echelons of the Babylonian Empire during a time when the Jewish nation was disbanded and in exile in that state. Like Joseph, who rose to a place of prominence in Egypt, God blessed Daniel and his three Jewish friends with him, and gave them favor and responsibility in the king's court. The king was so fond of Daniel that he was distraught over having to punish him due to his refusal to bow to the Babylonian god. Daniel's usefulness to the king made his refusal to bow even more stunning.



Our mark as Christians in the world will be more compelling and effective the more useful we are to society. Lined up against society and locked in a culture war that sets us apart, makes us that much easier to dismiss along with our beliefs. But as Christians who are contributors to the social fabric, we become an asset the community, making our faith that much more attractive. At least our faith stands a better chance of being rejected for what it truly is rather than for other reasons.

The biblical account says, "God gave [Daniel and his three friends] knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning... In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanterers in his whole kingdom' (Daniel 1:17, 20). In other words, they knew everything their contemporaries knew, and then some.

They knew more about Babylon than Babylonians, and remarkably, God gave them that kind of knowledge. God is not opposed to our being informed about the world we live in -- its culture, history, philosophy, science and its religions. In fact, that knowledge becomes an important part of how He wants to use us in the world.

Daniel served the king short of bowing to him. He refused to give him honor due only to God, but he gave him all the respect due a king. Likewise, we need to take the high road in our neighborhoods and communities and not get locked into mud wrestling over differing values and mores. Respecting others goes hand in hand with the gospel message. Our neighbors deserve both.

"You shall love the Lord your God... and your neighbor..." (Matthew 22:37-39)

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Catch of the Day

Shoeshine Man

by John Fischer

When it comes to serving one another, think of yourself as the shoeshine man.

We've all seen these guys in airports, train stations and downtown next to the newsstand. Their workplace usually consists of two or three elevated chairs on a platform so they can work at a comfortable level. The most upscale stations have plush leather-covered stuffed chairs and brass stands for your feet that put your shoes out where the shiner can work around them easily. Shining shoes is a servant's position that bears images of a happy-go-lucky soul, snapping his polishing cloth over shiny wing tips while cracking jokes or singing along with the radio.



A successful businessman, of course, would identify with the guy on the throne, never the one shining shoes. And yet, were Jesus here today, He would point to the shoeshine man as being the one to emulate. It's the closest thing in our society to what Jesus did when he washed the disciples feet, and then He told them to go and do the same. He lowered Himself to a servant's status, and then proceeded to meet the needs of those around Him.

Serving others begins with how I see myself. Paul said, "So look at Apollos and me as mere servants of Christ who have been put in charge of explaining God's secrets" (1 Corinthians 4:1 NLT). "Mere servants." I can't serve without first seeing myself as a servant. If being a shoeshine man seems too demeaning, I may need to rethink my calling and purpose in life, because a big part of that purpose is to serve others instead of being served.

Servants always look up to those around them. That's the other part of this image that works with Christ's foot-washing example. This whole arrangement puts me down and the other person up. For the shoeshine man, the customer is the V.I.P. The customer is on the throne in the plush seat.

My purpose as a follower of Christ is to put others on the throne instead of insisting on being there myself. I don't know about you, but for me, this is a radical redistribution of power.

So remember today, you're a servant. You don't need recognition—you don't need attention—because it's not about you... or me... it's about the people we serve. And when we forget... just remember the shoeshine man.

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Catch of the Day

Project Analysis

by John Fischer

I have been an evangelical Christian for a long time. I have been taught in evangelical institutions. We are not called “evangelicals” for nothing. That word means evangelism is a priority for us. We are always hearing how important it is to witness to those who don’t know Christ. And witnessing is OK, but actually leading someone to the Lord is the pinnacle of spiritual attainment. Good evangelicals are result-oriented.



It’s hard when you are schooled in this kind of thinking to not end up seeing non-Christians as projects. Their worth to you lies in the fact that they could be possible jewels in your crown. The more people you save, the more important you are to God, and the more confident you can be of your own salvation. Yes, I’m being pretty ruthless here, but I know all these thoughts and feelings all too well, and I am guessing I am not the only one.

Our evangelical mission in the world is very important. It is why we are here – why we aren’t all raptured as soon as we are saved. But I am learning that unless my name is Billy Graham, my role in evangelizing the world is more related to my lifestyle in the world – befriending and loving those around me who may not know Christ, and letting my witness be the natural outgrowth of what Christ means to me. I’m not a salesman. I’m not a missionary, spending two years of my life knocking on doors. I am a neighbor. A co-worker. A fellow student. A soccer dad. Ultimately, I am a friend, and my friendship is not measured by whether or not someone becomes a Christian, but on how loved and accepted they are by me.

I don’t go next door to witness. I go next door to borrow the lawn mower, which may lead to loaning something of mine in return, which may lead to finding something in common, which may lead to doing things together, which may lead to a friendship, which will undoubtedly end up in my being a witness, but that’s not the point. I’m not done when I witness. I’m called by Jesus to love my neighbor, and I’m never done doing that.

People know it when they are seen as a project. People know it when you really don’t like being around them, you are just putting up with them so you can fulfill your witnessing obligation.

I am learning to love people, to value who they are, regardless of their standing with God. And I’m pretty sure that’s how God feels about them, too. “He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent.” (2 Peter 3:9)

Let’s focus today on loving and serving someone who doesn’t know Christ. Who knows, we might even be a witness in the process.

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Catch of the Day

Coming Alongside

by John Fischer

I am normally not a fan of ten steps to this or five ways to do that. But for one of my recent talks I came up with these six things to remember about being around those who may not yet be Christians, and thought some of you might find it useful.



1) *Assume everyone is searching for God.* Why? Because everyone is. We were created this way. God has purposely frustrated humanity by creating us with eternity in our hearts, yet with an inability to fathom what that is or what it means (Ecclesiastes 3:10-11). He has done this so that we might reach out for him and find him though He is not far from any of us for in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:27-28).

2) *Come alongside.* This is really the crux of it all. Just walk alongside people and enter into their lives. Listen. Talk. Laugh. Cry. Find out where you can contribute and what you can learn. There's something to give and something to receive in every relationship.

3) *Point.* You don't tell someone what the truth is; you point to it. "There it is over there," or "Here it is in my life." This is why we need to learn to identify truth in the context of the world around us. Truth isn't religious. You don't have to get into a certain posture to see it. It's not something that hasn't been there all along.

4) *Find out what people already know before you set out to tell them anything.* Don't ever think you have to clear the table and start over. This is why it's so important to listen first. Find out what's already on the table that you can use.

5) *You don't have to tell everything you know.* Just the next thing.

6) *You don't have to correct everything someone says that is wrong.* You are not the protector and defender of truth. You don't have to decide where to draw the line. You don't even have to be concerned if someone may be walking away with the wrong idea. You are not that smart anyway because you don't know what's in someone's head. As long as they have something to think about, that's a good thing.

And now here's the one final thing that makes all this possible. It is the most important of all. (This is the one thing that makes all six of these make sense.) We don't save anybody, convince anybody, "win" anybody to Christ or close the deal. All that is God's business. The Holy Spirit is doing this all on His own terms and timetable. We are not salesmen, marketing reps, counselors or prosecutors. We are just friends who come alongside.

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Catch of the Day

Flunking Witnessing

by John Fischer

I heard a story once about a girl who flunked witnessing. Though this was an actual course she failed at a Bible college, I think we can all identify on some level with flunking witnessing as not a course, but a reality in our daily lives. I've flunked witnessing numerous times by simply not making myself available to the Holy Spirit for the job. Others have probably flunked witnessing by not feeling prepared enough. We have all kinds of ways of disqualifying ourselves for this job. We wouldn't know what to say. We wouldn't know how to bring up the subject. We haven't taken the course, much less passed it.



But telling others about Christ is one of the great purposes in our Christian lives. Why do we often find this so hard? Partly I think it's because we've made such a big deal about it. In some circles it's not one of five purposes, it's our only purpose, and it's usually presented as if we were at a sales conference getting pumped to sell our product.

I don't know about you, but I'm a very poor salesman. I'm the kind of guy whose sales pitch would be, "You don't want to buy this, do you?" I don't like interrupting people. I don't like infringing on their space. I hate it when people do that to me, so why would I engage in it myself? Plus, I don't like pretense. I don't like being nice to someone just to make a deal. I wouldn't want anyone to think they are a means to an end.

That's why I've been very encouraged to find out that true witnessing doesn't involve any of these things. It doesn't even involve having a memorized speech. Witnessing is really nothing more than befriending people and telling them your story at the right time (usually when they ask you).

Witnessing is being so in love with God that you eventually end up talking about Him. Witnessing is being so overwhelmed by the undeserved nature of your salvation that you can't contain your joy. Witnessing isn't coercing someone; it's quite the opposite. It's having someone coerce the gospel out of you, because they can't stand not knowing what's going on with you anymore.

If you want to prepare for anything, think about your own story, how you can tell it, and how you can connect it to the events that are happening around you, and the things that are going on in the world that you know people want to talk about. But don't worry about not being prepared. Probably some of the best witnesses around are people who would flunk a witnessing course, but make excellent friends.

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Catch of the Day

Tell me your story

by John Fischer

Every face has a story.

As a child growing up in the evangelical fundamental movement, there was an important aspect to the Christian life that was a big part of our faith -- at least, it was supposed to be. Most of us, however, experienced a good deal of guilt and apprehension about it. I'm talking about what was commonly called "witnessing." Witnessing was sharing your faith with others who were not Christians, to the end that they might want to become a Christian, too. Witnessing was right up there with reading your Bible, praying, and going to church, as the Big Four every Christian had to do.



It is surprising to me how much of these attitudes (guilt and apprehension) are still alive today. I spoke last week to a group of college students who exhibited some of these same fears and hang-ups about sharing their faith with others. So I surprised them by telling them NOT to witness. "Whatever you do," I said, "DON'T witness. DON'T save anyone." Instead I held up the card that carried the saying for the day -- "every face has a story" -- and told them that instead of witnessing, I wanted them to do something they've loved to do ever since they were little children. Listen to stories. That's it.

Hear the story, fall in love with the teller of the story (this won't be hard to do), and the Holy Spirit will do the rest. That's my new take on witnessing.

A lot happens when you listen to someone's story. You get to know them and appreciate them; and when you truly hear someone's story, and they know they were heard, that says that you care enough to listen. And that says a lot. It's the way a relationship is born, and as in any relationship, at the right time, you will tell your story, too.

"Tell me your story." It's such a simple thing that can go a long, long way. I can't think of anyone who wouldn't want to tell his or her story to someone who truly wants to hear it.

But you'd better get busy. There are lots of stories out there waiting to be heard. So many stories! So little time!

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Catch of the Day

The Power of Who You Are

by John Fischer

I sat next to a Jewish woman once at a PTA function and when she found out I was a Christian, she had a question all ready for me.

"Maybe you can explain this," she said. "A young man came to my door recently. He was a college student painting houses. My house needed painting so I took his card. When I asked him about the fish symbol I noticed on the card, he smiled and said 'Oh, I'm a Christian painter!' Now what do you suppose he meant by that?"

I laughed and told her I really didn't know except that he was a Christian who was trying to make some money painting houses.

When it comes to our place in the world, it's much better to be a Christian than to be a Christian something-or-other. In other words, stay away from using "Christian" as an adjective. No one knows what a Christian painter is anyway. Even Christians don't know; we just think we do because we use these terms all the time.

I asked the woman how she responded to his comment about being a Christian painter and she said, "Oh, I just asked him if he could paint!"

I like this lady. It's really pretty simple isn't it? It makes no difference to her if he was a Christian painter or a Muslim painter or a Buddhist painter... she only wanted to know if he could paint her house. There's a lesson here.

When it comes to our work in the world, our work comes first. The young painter, as well-meaning and as passionate about Christ as I'm sure he was, got his witness too far out in front of him. His witness is to do a good job as a Christian. How we do our job is not a means to a witness, it is our witness.

In the marketplace no one cares if you are a Christian. They just want to know: Can you paint? Can you compute? Can you run a company? Can you market this product? Can you manage this store? Can you operate this cash register and smile at all my customers? Once you prove yourself as having integrity and value to your employer, then the fact that you are a Christian will mean something.

People have so many religious preconceptions today. To announce your allegiance up front means you will have to fight through all those preconceptions just to be heard; and even then, the stereotype is hard to shake. If you establish credibility on other levels first, you can clear the deck of all that other stuff. Then you might have a better chance of getting someone to consider what it really means to be a Christian.

In the end, what you claim to be is nothing compared to who you are.



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Catch of the Day

Friend or Vacuum Salesman?

by John Fischer

We've all heard the story before, or perhaps it even happened to you.

You receive a visit from a friend you haven't seen in a long time. You are overjoyed at the reunion and honored that your friend would see the relationship worth cultivating and would actually seek you out. Or it might be a person you are just starting to get to know, and there are encouraging signs of a potential friendship.



In the course of a pleasant conversation, with the talk shifting randomly from one subject to another you suddenly find you are discussing the virtues of various vacuum cleaners. Your friend brightens at the topic because he's recently had some great results with an amazing new machine that he extols with great pleasure. You are so taken by his excitement that you find yourself wanting to know where you might find one of these amazing vacuum cleaners since your old model has paled in comparison to his vivid description, and you've been thinking about looking into a new one anyway. It's then that your new friend offers to solve all your problems by selling you one on the spot at a "one-time-only, low, low price of \$69.95."

Suddenly you feel an awful knot in the pit of your stomach. It's not unlike the feeling you had when you came home one day to find your house had been burglarized. You feel violated, used. And you feel stupid for trusting this person and making yourself vulnerable to his schemes. He's not after a friendship; he's after a sale.

A believer's mission to share Christ with people is one of the five great purposes for which we exist. But without the other four to balance it, we can end up peddling Christ with similar results. Even laying hold of a conversation with the intent of steering it in a particular direction can feel manipulative to a person.

If I listen to the other purposes in this light, I remember that God is in control of everyone's own road to discovery. I don't make anyone see the truth, I am only witness to what I have seen and heard. My relationship with people is an end in itself, regardless of whether or not they are Christian or Muslim, or Jewish or atheists. My purpose is to serve people, not sell them something. And maturity tells me that the Holy Spirit is my guide as to what to say and when, so as to not even worry about this or be overly conscious of my role in someone's life as providing anything other than love and support.

We don't take God's word, water it down, and then take it to the streets to sell it cheap. We stand in Christ's presence when we speak; God looks us in the face. We get what we say straight from God and say it as honestly as we can. (2 Corinthians 2:17 The Message)

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Catch of the Day

First Fish

by John Fischer

I took Chandler for his first camping trip this week to say good-bye to summer and give him a great send-off for his first day of Kindergarten. We ended up with an empty campsite to ourselves, and an all-around great experience that included catching his first fish. It was a nice fat rainbow trout that would have cooked up beautifully had we kept it.



Now the whole time leading up to this moment, he had talked of nothing but bringing a couple fish home for dinner, but the one thing Chandler hadn't counted on was the fact that eating a fish means it has to die first. There was no way he could have been prepared for the reality of seeing a fish flop around gasping for water. I even had it on ice for a moment when Chandler announced he didn't want to take it home; he wanted to put it back in the water. So I quickly threw it back in, and for a moment it floated upside down, and then flipped itself over and swam away.

So somewhere in the Kern River, or maybe in Lake Isabella by now, is a very lucky rainbow trout that has seen the inside of an ice chest and lived to tell about it.

When Jesus told Peter he was going to fish for men instead of fish, His disciples were used to a different style of fishing. They primarily used nets to capture a number of fish and gather them in. Baiting a fish, deceiving it, hooking it, reeling it in, grasping it in your hands, pulling out the hook and throwing it in an ice chest were not a part of a fish's reality at the time.

I wonder how many people out there have been hooked by a Christian, reeled in, and still managed to escape and are swimming around in the world with a bad experience to tell about. We need to be sensitive to those who may have been the target of someone's witnessing campaign that did not come with the gentleness, love and respect that should underlie any missionary effort. Part of our mission among those who are not Christians may include undoing mistakes that have gone before.

Remember, Jesus was talking about gathering in a "catch." To do so, you throw your net in the water, hope and pray for fish, and pull it up. It's really up to God to put the fish there, as He did for Peter before Peter even met Him. We throw out the truth and gather in those who respond. There may be one or none. There may be more than we can haul in. That's up to God, not us.

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Catch of the Day

Pool Mom

by John Fischer

I met a man once who served on the missions committee at his church. He told me how he was most proud of a certain former member of the committee – a woman who had put a promising career aside when she and her husband decided to adopt three children from Lithuania. Figuring that these children who had grown up at great risk would demand her full-time attention, she committed herself to that very thing. She did enjoy volunteering at the church, however, and ended up serving on the missions committee and teaching Sunday school.



Then suddenly, as abruptly as she had begun serving her church, she informed my friend that she was resigning from the missions committee and giving up her Sunday school class as well. He asked her what was wrong, and she said that everything was fine – God had just spoken to her, and she was going to follow his lead.

“I spent most of the summer being a ‘pool mom,’” she told him, “taking my kids to the pool four to five days a week. I became friendly with several other pool moms, and we all had a lot of time to talk together. As August was winding down and the pool was about to close, one of them said to me, ‘It has been a real pleasure getting to know you this summer. The rest of us have been friends all our lives. We went to the same schools, the same summer camps, and the same temple. We were at each other’s bat-mitzvahs, and we attended each other’s weddings, but we’ve never gotten to know anybody like you. Maybe we could keep in touch.’”

“So what could be a clearer direction from God than that?” She concluded. “I’ve decided to spend the next year completely focused on being a friend to this group of young Jewish ladies. I am going to practice friendship first and let evangelism take its natural course. And I don’t want to be distracted by the demands of church activities. If I don’t give them up, I’ll have a very hard time fitting my friends into my schedule. This next year is for them! After that, who knows?”

Think of that: She got off the missions committee to perform a mission – a mission of being a friend. Not that we should disband worship committees or that it will always take our full-time attention to be a friend, but this woman’s priorities are something we all need to pay attention to. Being a friend is a mission in and of itself, and connecting to those around us who are outside the church is more important than being on a host of committees.

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Catch of the Day

Make Someone's Day

by John Fischer

Here are some questions to mull over and then hopefully do something about. How are we as Christians making the world a better place for people who aren't Christians to live? Are we improving the lives of those around us? Are we adding to someone's day or taking away from it? Can you honestly say that the world around you is a better place because you are in it? Are you making a contribution in the neighborhood? Are you bringing people together? Did you smile at someone today? Did you notice someone?



Did you ask someone to tell you about their hopes and dreams? Did you ask them about their kids? And did you listen when they told you? Did you try and find out about someone just to find out, not to get somewhere or do anything with the information?

Spring is coming. The weather is going to get warmer. How about organizing a block party with all your neighbors? Or just invite someone over.

Is the P.T.A. asking for help? Does your teacher need volunteers to drive on the field trip? Does the soccer team need a parent manager?

And what about the Chamber of Commerce? Are you a member? Or the library? Or the soup kitchen (no, not the one your church is sponsoring but the one the community set up)?

Got an extra ticket to the ball game? Take the guy across the street instead of your best Christian buddy. What are you doing right now? Can you make someone's day?

Do you know Jesus? Do you want others to know Him too? A good place to begin would be to make someone who doesn't know Jesus happy that they know you.

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Catch of the Day

Being Saved

by John Fischer

In 2 Corinthians 2:15, Paul writes: "For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing..." In two simple phrases, he arranges all of living humanity into only two camps. There are "those who are being saved," and "those who are perishing." I would submit to you that this is a much better way to distinguish in our minds between people than to think of them as Christians and non-Christians.



Our usual distinctions as to Christians and non-Christians may, in fact, be wrong. Paul's definition is superior in that it implies a process while ours implies a fixed state. Christian and non-Christian terms also allow us to think we know something when we don't. These terms simply do not allow for the spiritual journey that we all are on. A person whom I might call a non-Christian today might very well be one who is being saved. In the same manner, I am sure there are people whom we would call Christians today who are, in fact, those who are perishing. In any case, we don't know for sure, who is what, and I, for one, think that's a good thing.

By thinking of people as being saved or as perishing, it relieves us of the pressure to have to pigeonhole everybody. Every single person you meet is either being saved or perishing, and you may not know which it is. This is the kind of truth that allows us to treat everyone the same. All have equal importance since the book is not closed on anyone.

And here's something I'd like to offer you in light of this if you find it helpful. I have decided that I will treat everybody as if they are being saved, regardless of what they say. Why not? If I'm right, then I will have helped them along the way. If I am wrong, then I will have created the best possible environment for them to believe.

Actually, I thank God I don't know ultimately who is perishing, because I can't imagine someone I love going to hell. I'm going to hope for them right up to infinity and beyond. You never know what kind of deals can be done with angels in the last seconds of life -- seconds that we may never know about. At least not yet.

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Pleasing God

by John Fischer

If you're anything like me, you are really good at beating yourself up on a regular basis. Most of us live with a lot of guilt. We were never good enough. Everything is our fault. This is because all our lives, we have learned acceptance based on performance. If we behave properly, we will be loved and accepted, but one mess-up and love is withdrawn. We are expected to do well, so we only hear about it when we don't.

God loves us on a wholly different basis. With God, we begin with love and acceptance and we move out from there.

When John the Baptist baptized Jesus, a voice was heard from heaven as He came up out of the water, "This is my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with Him" (Matthew 3:17). At this point in his ministry, Jesus has done nothing to prove Himself or earn his Father's approval. No healings. No teachings. No disciples. His baptism signaled the beginning of his ministry, and yet we find God fully pleased with Him at this point. It was a given.

It is the same thing with us. God delights in us just as we are. You are pleasing to God already. Or to put it another way: God likes you. This may be hard to believe but it is true. You bring pleasure to God right now as you read this.

God's love is extended freely through Christ's death on the cross. It's what Christ did that brings us into fellowship with God, not what we do. The things you do today will not cause God to like you or dislike you, they will grow out of knowing you already bring Him pleasure. And there is nothing you can do to alter that fact.

So take it. Bask in it. Yes, right now, without lifting a finger, God is pleased with you. He made you for this. He made you and He delights in you. This is where we start.

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Being and doing

by John Fischer

Knowing you are pleasing to God is one thing; pleasing Him is quite another. There's this little matter of our behavior. I will always love our son, Chandler; I may not always like what he is doing. It's all about being and doing.

Knowing we are pleasing to God is something that takes place at the core of one's being. God loves who we are. He looks at us and is pleased with what He made. But knowing we are pleasing to God is not a free hall pass from responsibility. It does not sanction bad behavior.

We can be pleasing to God and still do things that are not pleasing to Him. That's because being pleasing to God has to do with who we are, not what we do. One is being; the other is doing.

Ideally, one should lead to the other. Realizing we are pleasing to God should make us want to please Him in everything. And that's where we want to end up with these thoughts today. We want to find out what pleases God and do it. We want to not be just hearers of the word but doers of it also.

After all, it's only right that we should want to please Him when we realize that we already do, without doing anything.

Knowing you are pleasing to God to start with should make it easier to change. You operate out of love and gratitude, not out of trying to gain love and acceptance. Does that help?

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Get up and get out

by John Fischer

Your mission today (should you choose to accept it) is to get yourself up out of bed and throw yourself out into the world. That's right: Get up and get out.

My, how daring we are! Well, yes, when you consider how dangerous a place the world is, and how inadequate we feel when we try to make a difference in it. But just read this:

"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 2:15-16 NIV)

Now there is a picture: You and me having a significant effect on people, churning up reactions as varied as life and death by our mere presence. It's no surprise Paul would wonder, in the next breath, who, if any, might be equal to this task. It's a rhetorical question that he intends to answer, and he does in the next chapter. "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God who has made us adequate" (2 Corinthians 3:5-6 NIV) In other words, we aren't adequate, but we are. We aren't adequate in ourselves, but we are in Christ. And we find this out when we jump into the world, believing.

By believing, you are taking the particular characteristics of a believer (a person in whom God's presence is a factor) out into the world, and by nature of your presence in the world and the presence of Christ in your life, you will make a difference. So, you see, it is all about literally throwing yourself out there and trusting that God shows up when you do, even when you don't exactly know what's going to happen next, you just know you'll be ready when it does by nature of the Spirit of God in you. How about that for living dangerously?

As a friend of mine said once, almost nonchalantly, a true Christian is choosing the most dangerous occupation in the world. I think he's right, not only because Satan is alive and well on planet earth working to discredit those who believe, but because God likes us living on the edge in believing him. I really don't think faith is mainstream. I don't think it gets the popular vote. Real faith does not win mass-market appeal. True faith is a challenge of wits. It's the mover and shaker of the status quo. Faith kicks us out of our safety net and into the world. If nothing's on the line, then there's no faith required. That's dangerous, but all the more exhilarating when God shows up and shows himself to be true to his promises.

So get up and get out. It's the only way to truly find out!

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The last Christian

by John Fischer

We need a new name. Say "Christian" and you're a political activist bent on taking everyone's freedoms away. Say "born again" and you're a religious fanatic. Say "evangelical" and you're an enlisted officer in a culture war. Say "Jesus freak" and you are... well, just that.

Point is: we've been labeled, but what the labels engender in people's minds has little to do with what we are called to be as followers of Christ. How did this come to pass?

Looking back, historically, it seems to have all started with the high idealism and the crushing disillusionment of the '60s, the birth of a new breed of Christian through the Jesus Movement, and then how what started as Jesus music focused on the world turned into Christian music focused on Christians, and finally into a Christian subculture with a Christian version of everything. The point here being SAFETY became the key element and FEAR became the driving motivation and a big selling point for a safer alternative to the scary world out there. It has not always been this way. The Christian subculture is a product of my lifetime.

"The Christian subculture is more culture than it is Christian. It began as our attempt to affect the world, and has become evidence of the world's effect on us. The Christian subculture is not the church. It is not the kingdom of God. Both can do fine without it - both *are* doing just fine without it."

Our challenge? To be a Christian in culture, not a cultural Christian. The word Christian makes a really bad adjective. There is no such thing as a Christian anything; *there is only YOU! Who you are is God's answer to the world.*

The world doesn't need Christian music; it needs YOU making music. The world doesn't need Christian TV; it needs YOU in television. The world doesn't need Christian movies; it needs YOU in Hollywood. The world doesn't need a Christian coffeehouse; it needs YOU in Starbucks.

Heck with labels; the world needs YOU. You are the last Christian.