

life groups' sermon guide

gone fishin' – we were all fish once...



Life Groups exist at Kingsway to provide authentic relationships for spiritual growth, caring for one another, and reaching out to others.

"Come follow me," he said, "And I will make you fishers of men." (Mark 1:17)

"If heaven went my merit instead of favor our dogs would get in and we would not." - Mark Twain

Can you remember the moments that led directly to your accepting Christ? I don't mean a life time of church attendance, or years of hearing a great preacher. I'm not talking of the foundation or the person that sowed the seed. I'm talking of the moments just as that seed was harvested. I'm speaking of the hours, the minutes, maybe a day or two leading up to *the* moment. Can you remember it?

I can. And I remember the emotions that went with it: anger, fear, rejection. A realization that what I held dear from a life time of being in a church may not be quite all there is to God. That brought more fear and even more anger. It also brought rejection on my part; *"No, this is not what God is about."*

I remember being a bit scared because it seemed as if I was hearing the Bible as a final product for the first time. But the worst part was when I realized that I had to make a decision, a choice about what I was hearing. It was no longer a theory about a distant God and that was a bit frightening to be honest.

Do you remember those moments? Those emotions that ran through you as the truth of the Gospel spread through your heart? *Because those are the thoughts going through others when you are sharing your faith with them. Remember at this moment it's still your faith, your truth, not theirs.*

There is a time and a place for sharing your testimony, but that's not what we're looking for at this moment. (Those are fish stories). With that in mind, if you would, briefly share with us what you recall about those moments. Not your testimony, just those moments as you began to truly understand the reality of the Gospel. Everyone's experience will be different. What was yours?

Gone Fishin'

We took a trip to Arizona many years ago and my Aunt loved to fish. After about a week of this she caught something; Me. I was a fish waiting for one of those fishers of men. It might be said that I came to know Christ because of something missing in my life. It might be said that I came to know Christ because I felt there had to be more than what I knew. A lot of things might be said about why or how or what I expected in accepting Christ, but one thing is certain; I never set out to be a *"fisher of men."*

Even so, I remember the first few months after my confession and conversion. I couldn't wait to tell everyone I knew about Christ. I bet most of you had some of those same feelings when you first believed. The excitement and the emotions were at times almost overpowering. So in my exuberance I rushed out to tell everyone I knew. It mattered not that I was as ignorant as could be about most of scripture and had no experience with this. Most of those moments didn't go very well.

What about you, did you have that same exuberance?

How did those early efforts go for you?

Some years back I had a friend, a mentor really and he was a big influence on my early Christian life. I had been a Christian for a quite a few years but had not spent much time in the Word. My lack of knowledge about God and Scripture didn't keep me from speaking about Him or sharing the Gospel, but it did at times leave me unable to address issues or some harder questions. Something that was actually rather embarrassing at times.

His name was Joel and he and I were at lunch one day sharing a conversation I had at work. During this conversation a co-worker and I were discussing God and religion and I was unable to answer a few questions. Additionally and worse in my opinion, I was unable to locate the relative scripture to answer or refute a couple of his comments. Joel was the one that taught me the "*importance of always being prepared to give an answer...*" (**1 Peter 3:15**) That was the first time I had ever heard that scripture.

Everyone learns differently and it's almost impossible to tailor a class or a discussion that fits everyone's best method of learning. But Joel had a system that fit his style perfectly. He had in his Bible homemade tabs, color coded for different subjects and a small index he had made in the opening pages. As he discussed a subject he just simply flipped through tabs to get to where he wanted to be, or to offer up scriptural support of his words. With this system he simply walked his way through sharing his faith. He knew his scripture, but used his system to make sure he covered the points he wanted to cover.

I found his system fascinating. It may not have been my style but I recognized that in order to be able to successfully answer questions, to be ready to give an answer, I would need to have a better grasp of scripture. In other words, I needed a stronger understanding of the Bible, and the truths within if I was to be a "fisher of men." And I needed a better way to share those understandings.

Do you know these verses? How do they fit into our lives for others to see?

2 Timothy 3:16

Mark 1:16-18

Matthew 28:18-20

Luke 19:10

What about these:

John 3:3

Romans 3:23

Isaiah 64:6

Job 9:10-12

John 14:6

A Road Map

If we think of sharing our faith as a journey disguised as a conversation then we're actually attempting to get from point A to point B. That requires a plan, a roadmap as it were. My Map is titled: "***All*** have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God." -*emphasis mine*. (**Romans 3:23**)

That is a factual statement and an easy one for us because *we already know that truth*. But we had to come to that conclusion at some point in time, and so does everyone else.

I want to present you with a few questions *but I don't want you to immediately answer them*. Don't offer what first comes to your mind, but instead think over them. Think about what we're asking...

All of us can share our faith with most anyone to a certain level. However we are talking about a deeper conversation, something more than “Why I believe.” Don't feel you need to answer publicly, but you should look at how you share the Word and be able to answer honestly. There is a difference between a conversation with a friend, a stranger and the hardest of doubters, our families.

Keep these questions in mind.

- Q) Even if you've never thought about it in this manner do you have a “road map” or a “system” you use when presented with an opportunity to share your faith?
- Q) Is your style or system suitable for easy moments and more importantly for harder moments?
- Q) Is it simple to follow for every type of conversation, moving smoothly from point A to point B?
- Q) Does it allow for road blocks and detours *WHILE still getting you to point B?*

For some of us sharing our faith with strangers is no more intimidating than a simple nice to meet you conversation. For others it can be a daunting almost overpowering task, direction can be helpful.

There are of course different things required depending upon the circumstances and therefore no set idea of how to witness. However everyone is called so everyone should have an thought of where to begin or where to go quickly when the moment arises, should it be with a friend in need or a stranger angry about a tragic life moment.

Being very specific, even knowing that in this setting we can't cover every situation, share briefly your “system,” your road map. How would you answer those questions we just asked?

Yeah, but what about?

Over the course of a discussion I attempt to break resistance to the Gospel into different categories. It's just a personal thing that gives me an idea of where I think someone is in life. I call these categories the “*Yea but what about*” questions...

The easy ones: Why do I need a savior? Why am I a sinner?

The harder ones: Do you really believe Jesus is the only way? Why will a loving God send anyone to hell?

The really challenging ones: What about the people that never hear? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why did my son/daughter / spouse /mom / dad die?

There are of course many more and you may see them differently. It's not about a ranking system, it's about being prepared to answer them with a warm hearted mixture of scripture and genuine heartfelt empathy for someone. Because these questions are there and they ARE going to be asked.

These are the things on the minds of the word today. The truth is that believers as well as non-believers can struggle with some of them. Are you, as a fisher, ready to answer them. If not do you know where to go to get them answered?

Say... whose Job is that anyway?!!

When you think about it God is taking kind of a risk by putting into our hands the sharing part of His plans. *Go and make disciples?* **Wait!!** What if I fail? What if I miss an opportunity because I didn't see it or worse ignored it because I wasn't prepared?

"I mean come on Lord, just how much of this do you want me to do?"

If we are to be fishers of men where does our responsibility begin and where does it end, so to speak. I'm not talking about walking alongside a believer; I'm speaking directly to the witnessing /conversion process of a non-believer. This seems an easy enough question but it's not as simple as we may think.

I work in a task oriented profession and I've always hated the phrase "That's not my job." But you know what? The actual conversion process *is not my job*. There is a separation of responsibilities here. We can do everything "right" but people still walk away and we can stumble through a conversation in the worst way possible and someone fall to their knees.

Why is that? What is the separation of responsibility here and how do we accurately describe it?

Do we honestly understand it and model it so we're not offended or discouraged with what we may think are less than hoped for results when we share our faith?

Think through that last question... When we first started we talked about the moment we first believed. Was the person that spoke to you at that time the one that actually sowed the first seed?

Do you think others that shared the truth were discouraged when we didn't respond to their efforts?

Were you like me, confused for a long time over whose role it was to actually change a heart? I wore out many a baseball bat over a few heads attempting to get them to see things *as I knew they were!* I can laugh now, but back then, whew! *"The Bible Says" has a lot more authority than "Scott says!"*

If we understand the roles we play, then we can move forward knowing confidently that *"He who began a good work in you will see it through."* (Philippians 1:6)

Discussing eternal matters like salvation should not just be happenstance. We should always be in tune to what's is going on around us so when the opportunity arises we are prepared to speak about our Faith.

If it's a spontaneous moment with a close friend struggling with a hard moment and lots of tears and you simply share how you survive life, or an intentional conversation with a coworker, friend or family member set against the gospel, our calling is the same; *be prepared.*

When I was hearing the truth, when I was approaching the moment of believing I was still at that time an enemy of God's. Thankfully someone saw me as more than that, they saw me as a fish and went fishing. I have to tell you, I'm awfully glad they did.