

life groups discussion guides

you have to see this



“People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care”
— Theodore Roosevelt

“The winning and establishing of a soul for Jesus Christ can’t be done on a hit-and-run basis.”
— Jim Rayburn

Earn the right to be heard.

I have heard – and used – that phrase countless times. So much, in fact, that I can say it without thinking very deeply at all about what that looks like. My first exposure to it came through Young Life, a Christian youth group for high school students. Unlike other student ministries, this one was focused on kids who were NOT coming to church, instead of as youth program of the church for kids who attended. While I can’t say that the phrase “earn the right to be heard” originated there, it was a foundational concept for Young Life founder Jim Rayburn.

1938, Jim Rayburn, a young Presbyterian youth leader in Gainesville, Texas, was given a challenge by a local minister – to consider the neighborhood high school as his parish and develop ways of contacting kids who had no interest in church. He and his pastor, Clyde Kennedy, worked out a plan whereby Jim would work with disinterested kids instead of those who already attended their church. Rayburn started a weekly club for kids. There was singing, a skit and a message about Jesus. Club attendance increased dramatically when they started meeting in the homes of the young people. Young Life now annually impacts over one million kids.

Q :: Rayburn’s solution of taking church to young people since they couldn’t get the young people to come to church is still a fairly radical approach. And yet, isn’t that the same approach God took with us? In what ways might we be able to do likewise?

Q :: It strikes me interesting that our invitation is often for unbelievers to “come and see” – but the model God used with us (in sending Jesus from Heaven) was one of “go and show”. What are the differences between the two approaches? Which is harder? Which do you think will more greatly impact lost people?

Q :: It is possible to “earn the right” – but never be heard. It is also possible to not earn the right – but make sure that we’re heard anyway. The results of either is missed opportunity for the Kingdom. What does earning the right AND being heard by your unsaved friends or family look like for you?

In Matthew 4:19, Jesus said “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” While I personally have not fished since I was a child I do know this: No fisherman, no matter how skilled, has ever caught a single fish from his couch. Success in fishing depends on several factors, but the first and most important is actually going to where the fish are – often even leaving the shore and laboriously paddling out into the environment of the fish. Fishing in Jesus’ day was not the lazy Sunday afternoon napping under the tree while your line serenely bobs in the pond. Being a fisherman involved much strain, long hours, and often little results – and was very labor-intensive.

Q :: Jesus said nothing carelessly or without purpose. What might be some other things Jesus was getting at with the fishers of men analogy? (keeping in mind that he was talking to actual fishermen when giving the invitation)

Pastor Kermit Long once said: “We’re no longer fishers of men, but keepers of the aquarium”. It’s an interesting observation when you break it down. Fish in the aquarium have already been caught, and nowhere in Scripture

are we told to stop fishing. Much like in the differences between a relaxed day of fishing with your rod & reel and getting out in a boat & casting your net, there seems to be an active vs. passive approach at play.

Q :: How can we combat what might be a tendency to grow passive in our outreach to others?

Here's the interesting thing in all of this – we were once the fish who needed to be caught. We once swam where the other fish are. You see, I think we become aquarium keepers when we forget that we are fish ourselves. The difference is – and this is significant – someone once threw a net out for us.

Q :: Who threw the net out for you? Were they a “come and see” person – or a “go and show”? Were they active or passive in their relationship with you?

I think we would all agree that making disciples will require a level of boldness on our part. Being pushed outside our comfort zone. But what if that doesn't mean what we think it does? What if the kind of boldness we need is not so much to speak up, or with what we will say when we do – but with who we will accept enough as to befriend so that we may earn the right to say it?

I listened to a sermon recently from Paul Sheppard about loving and accepting people. In it he spoke about the church being a hospital for the lost and broken – a place for sick people to come and get well. He closed with this convicting thought:

“When we learn to accept people, God will send them. Some of them won't look like you; act like you; some of them, you'll think they're strange. But remember, when you think people are strange, chances are they think you're strange too. But I know, that if the church will learn to accept others – neither condemning, nor condoning, but pointing the way (and Jesus said I AM the way, the truth and the life) – we'll see God move in a marvelous way, and it'll help us establish unity in our midst.”

Q :: Most of us will nod when hearing that the church is to be a hospital for broken people – where they are loved and accepted. Sometimes it's hard to remember – WE are the church....not the building where we meet. Does it strike you differently to say that **YOU AND I** are to be a hospital for the broken – a place where sick people come to get well? Agree with that idea? What does that look like?

Q :: I heard a sermon recently wherein the pastor offered this insightful observation:

“the culture is not our enemy – the culture is the hostage of our enemy”

Does seeing the culture that is often very intensely at odds with the Christian worldview and being a hostage of our true enemy alter how we engage with them? If so, how?

I've had a conviction lately that I need to be very mindful of my attitudes toward the unbelieving world. In a world where civil discourse and agreeing to disagree has been replaced with demonizing those who hold a different opinion, this gets more and more challenging. It becomes VERY easy for me to forget my “fishiness”.

I will leave you with this thought about how Jim Rayburn wanted to feel about those still outside the net. In 1941, in self-admonishment, Rayburn wrote in his journal:

“Christian fella, you have a great God-given responsibility toward the ones outside God's family, walk in wisdom towards them—behave wisely—this involves so much—remember they are in the dark—their understanding is nil—their senses are dulled—they cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God. To behave wisely towards them will involve being understanding and friendly, avoiding ugliness or criticism—always being gentle and tactful.”

If that were true – and very much needed – in 1941...how much more so today?