REACHING MEN FOR CHRIST

IS YOUR BAIT WORKING?

I just couldn't believe it. There he was, a young boy, pulling in the fish, one right after another. And only about 10 feet away from where we were fruitlessly awaiting our first nibble.

I enjoy nature to be sure, but my goal was to catch fish! Not that anyone was counting, but, our tally was a big fat zero!

Visions of the good ol' days swam through my head, back in the north country of Minnesota fishing for pike at White Iron Lake with Grandpa. Fish were bigger back in those days and ready for the picking. Yes, many pictures can be found in the family archives of my brother and I with Gramps, beaming from ear to ear as we strained every muscle to hold up our stringers of fresh pike (and bass and walleye, too).

But, times they are a changing, as the song goes. Most of those kind of pictures are old. Fish aren't biting like they used to. Not too many fishermen like Grandpa, anymore.

But, then again, there was that young boy, pulling them in left and right. Why? I had caught fish a long time before this youngster had ever been born. I was taught by the expert, who had a proven record. My equipment was newer and better! But -- he had the fish.

Finally, swallowing my pride, "How are you doing that". I knew how silly that sounded, but desperation was my master. I wanted to know why I wasn't catching fish!

He responded, "The fish in this stream like corn ...", as his outstretched hand offered me some.

But, I protested to myself, I have always used worms! Sometimes minnows or leeches. But, never corn! He simply kept right on fishing and I kept looking at his pail full of fish.

As fishers of men we must ask what bait would best attract men to hear the gospel. Paul said, "I have become all things to all men so

that by all possible means I might save some" (I Cor 9:22). Jesus healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, spoke compassionately, all of which was designed to attract people to Him and the need for salvation.

Are we stuck always using the same bait. Just because it worked in another time and place does not mean it will work everywhere. Often, we try to bring men to where we are -- the chapel buildings for our special gospel services or meetings. But, our evangelical "sub-culture" is foreign to man men of the world and often is a stumbling block. If there is to be a stumbling block, it should be only Christ.

Of course, just as we would never want to use poisonous bait in going after real fish, so too, our means of reaching out to men must not be detrimental to either the true presentation of the gospel or detrimental to the glory of God. But, we should use bait that is most effective in reaching the men whom we seek for Christ.

At Auburn Bible Chapel the challenge was thrown down at one of our monthly men's prayer breakfast (we were all Christians). "Who would like to go for broke and reach unsaved men." Three men responded and met for lunch to talk about a vision.

We discussed that the best bait to use must meet the felt needs of the men we wanted to reach. Today, men of the world are lonely for friendships. Even beer companies sell their product using the attractiveness of camaraderie in their commercials. Most men in business are use to quality presentations. And of course, most men like good food and sports.

The results were bi-monthly dinner outreaches for men. Here is what the "bait" looked like:

1) Quality time in a quality restaurant with a quality meal. Since we wanted to avoid any unnecessary stumbling blocks, we patterned the evening after a typical business dinner that a company might have. It would take place in a nice restaurant with a seminar format at the end. This would expose non-Christian men to Christian men in a non-threatening atmosphere and nurture friendships. For this, a private room works best. In addition, we ask the management ahead

of time not to take orders from the bar.

2) No special music. We decided this would sound too "churchy" for many unsaved.

3) Christian men must bring an unsaved friend, associate or neighbor. We didn't want this to become just another Christian men's fellowship -- we have enough of those already. This guarantees at least 50% of those attending would be unbelievers. Those that complained it wasn't fair if they didn't have someone to bring were gently reminded that there are other meetings designed for fellowship. But, this effort is designed for outreach.

4) Meals paid ahead of time. Each man paid his own way (collected ahead of time). One fixed price included tax and gratuity (we wanted also to leave a credible impression on the eating establishment). We all would have the same meal. Each Christian was encouraged to pay for his guest, as well. Some who couldn't afford all this were subsidized by other generous brothers.

5) An honorarium was given the speaker by the chapel, to keep the cost per person down.

6) The program. After dinner, the M.C. opens the "seminar" with humor and introductions of humor. This lets our guests know we as Christian men can have a roaring laugh. And humor relaxes everyone and opens ears.

7) The speaker. For this, we have tried to get men from interesting walks of life. We have found what attracts men of the world are: professional athlete, a contractor, an officer of large corporation, lawyer, financial expert, etc. With a few phone calls or letters, committed Christians like this can be found.

The speaker makes a presentation about his life's work or something that will be of practical help to the men at the dinner. But, we also have the speaker weave in, as appropriate how Christ has made a difference in his life. It is important that the speaker can clearly articulate his relationship with Christ. No hard sell gospel. Simply a testimony -- no preaching!

8) Casual discussion following. The ground work has been laid.

Many men report that the conversations on the way home were very open for personal interaction about the gospel. Friendship evangelism takes over.

What are the results? First, in our little part of the stream, our attendance has been anywhere from 20 - 60 men, with roughly 50% attending being unsaved. Many of these return repeatedly and some have even invited their friends. We have had four men trust the Savior, and others are considering it.

Second, if any of these men do come to Sunday meetings at the chapel, they will not feel like complete strangers, one less obstacle to overcome.

Third, Christian men are being spurred on to witness for the Lord. Friendship evangelism is emphasized, for the work of the gospel is to be done by all of us (Matt 28:18-20)

Another "bait" that has been used in this area, is the annual wildlife dinner. Christian men from the surrounding assemblies donate some of their wild meat from hunting season. Again, to attend, you must bring a non-Christian friend. At the most recent dinner, 190 men attended, more than half of which were non-Christ. Following the meal a speaker addressed hunting and fishing topics and another speaker presented the gospel.

These are some of the bait God is using in this "little stream". Not everyone responds to the same "bait". But, we are beginning to reach a whole group of men that may have never heard the gospel otherwise. The message is the same, the methods change. Men are being won to the Lord.

Did I ever catch fish in that stream next to the young boy? Well, no. By the time I found out his "secret", it was lunch time and I was tired of fishing.

But, in fishing for men, Let us not be hindered by the comforts of the flesh and or the weariness of well doing. Let us use whatever means we can to present the unchanging gospel to our lost and dying world. Most important - KEEP ON FISHING!