

## Catch Them First

We want to clean our fish before we get them into the bucket. Then we wonder why they wiggle off the hook! Why they leave angry. Why they don't like us anymore. Maybe it's because they've grasped a basic principle we've forgotten. Perhaps they instinctively know that if there really is a God somewhere, He is going to care more about their heart than their hair color. This God will see their true value even when they're a mess on the outside. That's the kind of God this generation is looking for. What kind of God are we offering them?

Jesus put up with all kinds of stuff—even from His own disciples. Mistakes. Arguments. Unbelief. Jealousy. I'm sure those guys didn't smell very good either. But Jesus really loved them—and they knew it. That love won their hearts and they followed Him, even at the cost of their own lives.

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We forget how spiritually hungry the lost really are. We forget that they pray (yes they pray) and they cry out for help from a God they don't know yet. We forget how they think and feel. We get so judgemental when they come to church looking like they're going to a party, instead of rejoicing that they came at all! We look superficially. But Jesus looks deep into the heart.

**Why Aren't More People Getting Saved?**  
Maybe the walls around our church are as high as the walls around our hearts. Way too high for sinners to climb. Maybe we can't see past our own little world, into the hearts and hurts of people in our communities, our schools, our work place, our streets. God hears each of their cries. Do we? We know if we do, it will cost us. That's why we often choose judgement over compassion. Judgement distances us from people—which means we don't have to give any part of ourselves. Compassion draws people to us—which means we need to give them our time, our energy, our love.

Look around you. Can you see the hurting, the lonely, the poor, the young—they are hungry for truth and genuine relationship. We really can win them to Jesus. It's not that hard.

So why aren't more people getting saved?

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## Why Aren't More People Getting Saved?

by Melody Green

Something has really been bothering me. How come so many sinners liked Jesus—but they don't like us. They liked to hang out with Jesus. He got invited to their homes for dinner, to their parties... people even hung in trees just to look at Jesus—and He wasn't even good looking!

You might say, "But Jesus was God! He was full of charisma and anointing." True. But I think it's more. Nobody preached a harder message than Jesus. Remember His "eat my flesh drink my blood" moment? Yet, Jesus had something we lack. Something we could have if we wanted. I think it's called compelling, compassionate, overriding love for people.

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## Do we show people the face of judgement or the face of compassion?

We say we love the lost, but do we really have a burden for them? Do we show them the face of judgement or the face of compassion?

After 17 years in the "Bible Belt" I moved back to California. I'd been asking God for more of His heart for the lost, and California was the perfect place. Sure, there are many believers here, but it's also full of people who seem to wear their disdain for Christians like a badge of honor.

After being in California awhile, and striking up conversations with lots of random people, I began to remember how I felt before I met Jesus.

I didn't like Christians either. They appeared narrow minded, judgemental, and worst of all, lacking in genuine compassion. Their answers to life seemed trite and unrealistic. Their theology, prehistoric. Their holier than thou attitude totally turned me off. In the days when I was looking for "the truth" I was positive Christians didn't have it. In the minds of unbelievers today things haven't changed much. Obviously, Christians do march to a different drum, which for the most part is a good thing. But sometimes we actually push people away from the Lord, instead of drawing them closer.

Why?

### **Fishers of Men**

Jesus called us to be fishers of men. But sometimes we forget how fishing really works. Bear with me for a quick refresher.

A fisher studies the kind of fish they want to catch. They find their favorite hangout and get bait they can't resist. The line is weighted for top or bottom feeders. Then it's cast in and the wait begins. When a tug is felt, the fisher needs to know if it's just a nibble, or if the bait has been swallowed. At just the right moment, a hard pull "sets the hook." Many fish are lost by an early or late pull. But even when one is on the line, it must be very carefully reeled in. Often there's a tug of war, two feet forward one foot back. Some slack is given or the line might snap. Big fish can take hours to reel in. When the fish is in reach, he might be scooped into a net so he doesn't wiggle off the line. Even a caught fish can flop its way back into the water if not tended properly. Sometimes the fish is put in a bucket of water to keep him alive and fresh. It's only after all that effort that you finally get to clean your fish.

But what do we do with people? We forget the process. We worry about how to clean them before they're even caught! We want people to stop smoking, stop doing drugs, stop wearing "unChristian" clothes, dye the rainbow out of their hair, take the metal out of their faces, and generally clean up their act before—or shortly after—they've met Jesus. Why? Because most of us want a clean tidy church, clean tidy disciples, and clean tidy friends to hang out with. If Christians would have treated me this way, I don't know if I would have gotten saved. But I met people who put up with my ignorance, my immodesty, my bad language, and my spiritual patchwork theology. They reached out to me in genuine love. They saw beyond my messy offensive exterior and looked into my heart. When they did, they saw a heart that was hungry for God. I got loved into the Kingdom, by real flesh and

blood people who showed me, in practical ways, how much they cared about me.

I gave my heart to Jesus because I could see Him in people who said they loved Him. I wanted to be like those people. I wanted to know the God they knew. Even after Jesus really won my heart, it still took awhile before I cleaned up my act. It was mostly the work of the Holy Spirit, with a few "friendly hints" along the way. But we often push people to make big changes before they're fully won. We want them to "prove" they love Jesus by changing the outside, before they're totally convinced on the inside. And believe it or not, sometimes Jesus doesn't want them to change their outward appearance because He is sending them to reach others who look just like they do.

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