

www.ShepherdServe.org

You are welcome to distribute printed copies of this document, or copy and paste this document to distribute via email, as long as the document is unaltered and kept in its *entirety* (including copyright notices), and is not sold for profit. However, if you wish to post this material on your website or anywhere else online, you must first contact us to get permission. ©2007 by David Servant

August 2007 E-Teaching
By David Servant

Receive David's monthly e-teaching in your inbox.
<http://www.shepherdserv.org/newsletter.htm>

Dear Friends,

Last month I received a letter from an enthusiastic reader who told me that he has been downloading the first chapters of my evangelistic book, Forgive Me for Waiting so Long to Tell You This, printing them, and leaving them in the men's bathroom stalls where he works. He said they are being read, and no negative comments so far!

Some years ago, right after the fall of the iron curtain, we published 10,000 copies of that same book in Lithuania (in Lithuanian) and a Christian woman took a copy to her unconverted parents. Her hard-hearted father threw the book into their fireplace, but her mother quickly saved it from the blaze and rebuked him, saying they shouldn't waste what could serve as perfectly good toilet paper! She promptly nailed my book to the inside wall of their outhouse. Some days later her husband came in from the outhouse angry that pages were missing from the toilet paper—which he had been reading with great interest! He later gave his life to the Lord, and his daughter wrote to tell me about it!

May this month's e-teaching similarly (but not identically) find its way into your heart! — David

P.S. You can read Forgive Me for Waiting so Long to Tell You at <http://www.shepherdserv.org/apologetics.htm> or order a copy to give to an unsaved loved one at http://www.shepherdserv.org/books/book_prices.htm.

It's Time to Try Pond #2!_by David Servant

Imagine for a moment that you are fishing at the edge of a pond. You've been standing

there all day every day for months, continually casting your line, lashing the waters to foam. Thousands of worms have sacrificed their lives in the process. But for all your efforts, the only thing that has happened is that on one day, one fish jumped one time and spit in your direction. Pretty discouraging fishing.

Then imagine seeing another pond right beside that first one. You decide to give it a try. While you are about to put a worm on your hook, even before your first cast, fish start jumping out of the pond attempting to eat the worm in your hand. Before long there are hundreds of fish lying at your feet.

If such a thing happened, do you suppose that you might decide to do a little less fishing at Pond #1 and a little more fishing at Pond #2?

In this e-teaching, I'd like to talk about fishing—fishing for people that is—in Pond #2. First, however, let's consider what's been happening at Pond #1 for many years.

Pond #1: Where the Fish Aren't Biting Any More

One of the greatest tragedies of our day is that so many Christian leaders don't realize (or don't care) that Pond #2 exists. Consequently, most of them spend all their time fishing around Pond #1. Even more tragic is the fact that most of the fishermen standing around Pond #1 have never, or rarely, actually *caught* a fish. As a result, they have redefined fishing altogether. Now they are donning goggles and snorkels and wading out into the pond. Some even wear fish suits in order to look just like the fish in the pond, hoping not to spook them. Once submerged, they scatter some fish food, trying to gather the largest number of fish around them for an hour or so, usually on Sunday mornings. This they call *fishing*. Gone are the days when fish were actually caught and taken out of the pond—out of their old life—to die, be cleaned, and resurrected in the body of another. (I'm really pushing this analogy to the max!)

Those whose Sunday-morning fish gatherings are largest are those who have discovered the food that is currently favored by the fish. They are deemed successful. The fish, however, soon have their fill, and after an hour or so, are ready to swim back to their favorite spots in the pond. They'll be back next week—unless they can find a "fisherman" who offers a better meal (or better yet, a meal with a show). There are lots of fishermen wading (or swimming) in Pond #1 on Sundays competing with each other for the largest share of the fish.

Too many Christian leaders have forgotten that the goal is not to see who can gather the largest crowd on Sundays, but to make disciples who obey all of Christ's commandments (see Matt. 28:19-20). That process begins, of course, with preaching "repentance for the forgiveness of sins" as commanded by Jesus (see Luke 24:7). But the fish in Pond #1 don't want gospel worms on hooks. They want candy, and not candy on hooks, but candy just tossed to them. They love their pond, and want no attachments to anything else.

This kind of "fishing" has been going on for so long that many younger fishermen have never seen it done any other way. So they mindlessly wade into Pond #1 every Sunday with their bags of candy, and it never occurs to them that there is something much better, something eternally better, waiting at Pond #2.

On Monday mornings you'll find some of the older fishermen drinking coffee together along the shores of Pond #1, reminiscing about the days when the fish were biting there. Some of them have been praying for years that the fishing will improve. Meanwhile, most of the fish in Pond #2 have never seen a worm...

The Great Bait Exchange

At one time, the fish were indeed biting in Pond #1. But not any more. And as they have become increasingly disinterested in the gospel, unfortunately the fishermen have altered it to accommodate the fishes' increasing resistance to the idea of repenting and following Jesus. Decades ago, when the current cultural hardening first began, preachers took note that the old methods of proclaiming certain essential elements of the gospel—for example, humanity's sinfulness and God's wrath—were not drawing the crowds as previously. And it was observed that speaking only about God's love brought more people forward during the altar call—albeit without tears. Before long, repentance was also edited from the message. And "accepting Jesus as your personal Savior" ultimately became the means to eternal life, rather than repenting and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. All this was done just for the sake of getting crowds and maintaining the appearance of spiritual success.

And the compromises have only become worse, just as Scripture predicted long ago (see 2 Tim. 4:3-4). These days one can allegedly believe in Jesus without becoming His disciple (now proffered as an optional step for the heaven-bound). Perhaps the crowning evolution of this ever-changing "gospel" is the modern version designed to appeal to the greedy, selfish people being told that God wants them to be even richer (so they can be even more selfish). Tens of thousands of churches have been built on this "gospel."

At one time I thought that if we could recover the biblical gospel in Western nations, we'd surely see the revival we long for. But now I'm sure I was wrong about that. If John Wesley, George Whitefield, Charles Finney, or even the apostle Paul preached in North America today, they would be dismal failures. People don't want to hear the truth. It's time to try Pond #2.

Pond #2: Where the Fish Are Biting...if Only Given the Chance

So where is Pond #2? It is everywhere that people are receptive to the gospel, or might be receptive to the gospel if given a chance to hear it. Pond #2 still exists, to a limited degree, in Western nations (and I'll talk about that shortly). But Pond #2 exists primarily

in places like India, Cuba, Nepal, China, Pakistan, Tanzania, and scores of other poor nations.

It should not be any wonder that, generally speaking, Pond #2 is filled with *poor* fish, because Jesus told us that it is impossible to serve God and money, and He also said that it is not easy for rich people to enter the kingdom, because they normally don't want God controlling their money. Jesus Himself was called to "preach the gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18), not because God doesn't care about the rich, but because the poor are usually more receptive than the rich. This is one reason why Western nations are so unreceptive.

If you want to find Pond #2, search for the poor around the world. You won't have to search long, since almost half of the world's population lives on less than two dollars a day. Two billion people are undernourished. 700 million are malnourished. 2.2 billion people are without safe water to drink, while 25,000 die daily from dirty drinking water. 1.3 billion people are without adequate housing. 1.4 billion people are without adequate clothing. It would seem that the church of Jesus Christ could seize this opportunity to show God's love and proclaim His gospel.

In India, where more impoverished people live than in any other nation (300 million live on less than one dollar per day), it is estimated that there are half a million villages and towns without a single church or gospel witness. Yet there is spiritual hunger. Here is an excerpt from a recent e-mail from my friend K.V. Daniel of India, reporting on a "fishing trip":

Every time I travel into the villages I see the simplicity and the power of the gospel....I was in Orissa villages, among a group of people who has never heard the gospel. People are so poor and hardly eat one meal a day. No good houses or clothes. Kids starve to live. No medical facility. People have to walk miles to buy or sell anything. I had the privilege to share the gospel with them. We fed many kids and villages. First time in their life they had a full meal with chicken curry. People were literally falling down and kissing our feet for a blessing. I was humiliated by their simplicity and faith. Twelve people took water baptism. *Two-hundred more are ready.*

In China, where 1.4 billion people live, the fish are biting by the thousands every day. Here is an excerpt from a recent report I received from Dennis Balcombe, a legendary missionary to China and an authority on the church there:

We are now in the time of a great harvest in China and every week I am seeing hundreds saved and baptized in water. Churches are growing very fast, but there is a great need for training the leaders...

And here is a report from Paul Hattaway, another authority on what is happening in China, and author of *The Heavenly Man*:

The kingdom of God continues to advance in China. With the 2008 Olympics just

around the corner, it seems that overall the government has decided to pause in their persecution of Christians, because they don't want any bad press. There are believers continuing to be arrested and imprisoned, but much less than usual. The house churches have taken advantage of this to preach the Gospel even more fervently than usual, and thousands are being saved throughout the country every day.

I could cite similar encouraging reports from other nations. Fish are biting all over the world! Wouldn't it be wise for every Western Christian leader to find out where the fish are biting and get involved in some way to help reel in the catch? Why is so much effort and money expended to fish in Pond #1 where the fish are hardly biting and so comparatively little effort and money expended to fish in Pond #2 where the fish *are* biting? What we are doing makes less sense than if Mary Kay were sending all her saleswomen to sell cosmetics to the monkeys at the Dallas Zoo.

Leaving the Dead to Bury the Dead

Clearly, Jesus doesn't want us wasting our time at Pond #1. He said:

And as for those who do not receive you, as you go out from that city, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them (Luke 9:5).

Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces (Matt. 7:6).

Paul was a wise fisherman who followed Jesus' instructions in this regard. Read about a time that he said good bye to Pond #1 and hello to Pond #2:

But when they resisted and blasphemed, [Paul] shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (Acts. 18:6).

Christians in Western nations so often wonder why the reports they hear of miracles and healings are always from overseas. The answer is that God isn't wasting His time trying to reach unreceptive people. What Abraham said to the rich man in hell is fully applicable to hardened Western nations:

If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead (Luke 16:31).

So why not work where God is working? Why not reach out to those who have not yet heard a single verse from the Bible?

Every true Christian church should have fishing in Pond #2 as a primary priority. Pastor,

how much of your church budget is being invested in Pond #2? Are you ready to justify that percentage before Jesus? And dear pastor, if your "sheep" aren't interested in helping in some way to reel in the fish in Pond #2, they aren't sheep at all. They're goats. True sheep get excited about Pond #2.

Every God-called evangelist should be making an effort to go to Pond #2. And when you get there, dear evangelist, please don't take the Western "candy gospel." You can actually *catch* fish in Pond #2, not just gather them on Sundays, and you can do it with the same message that the apostles preached.

Every Christian in the Western world should be helping, in some way, to reel in the catch in Pond #2. Support a missionary or evangelist whom you know who is preaching the truth and making disciples in Pond #2. Or, there are wonderful ministries, such as *Gospel for Asia* and *Christian Aid* (and *Heaven's Family* by the year's end) whereby any Christian can support a native church-planter who is fishing every day in Pond #2.

Fishing in Pond #2 Right from Your Doorstep

Pond #2 actually limitedly exists right in our back yard, but you have to look for it. Every year, over a million new immigrants legally relocate in the United States, looking for a better life. This year, 70,000 of those immigrants will be refugees who have been granted asylum because of suffering religious or political persecution in their native lands. Many other developed nations besides the U.S. receive refugees. Canada, for example, accepts more than the U.S. on a per-capita basis.

How those refugees would appreciate someone who would reach out to them and be their friend, who would help them assimilate to a new way of life, and how they need a Christian to save them from a culture that will try to suck them into hell with it. Many of them, when they first arrive, come with open hearts. My wife has been serving refugees for years in our hometown of Pittsburgh. Our son has begun helping two young men who are recent refugees from Myanmar. They've lived practically all their lives in a refugee camp in Thailand. (To find a U.S. organization that needs volunteers to help them resettle refugees, visit www.state.gov/g/prm/rls/fs/82822.htm.)

Every year there are more than half a million international students studying at American colleges and universities. Most of them would love to be invited to an American home for a meal, especially during the holidays when the rest of the student body heads home. Two years ago on Christmas day we were sitting around our dinner table with two Chinese students when one of them asked, "Can you please tell me about Jesus Christ?" That made witnessing fairly easy! And that open door has led to more, to the end that two other Chinese students are just about ready to commit their lives to Jesus. Last year on Christmas day I had a wonderful conversation about the Lord with several Taiwanese students. To find out how you can be the friend of an international student, just contact the international student office at the closest college or university.

Suffering people are often more receptive to God than those whose lives are easy. Those who are ill, or who have recently suffered some tragedy, can sometimes be found in Pond #2. There is no doubt in my mind that God tries to open people's hearts by allowing them to experience a dose of His temporal wrath. Here is another report from Dennis Balcombe, writing about the opening of some Hindu hearts after the Indian Ocean tsunami:

I visited Batticaloa, Sri Lanka, where the tsunami destroyed a large Hindu temple made of huge stone blocks, killing all the people inside and sweeping a large heavy Hindu idol—18 feet high made of iron—two kilometers away (impossible to even conceive). However next to the temple a simple Christian church was left standing and all the people were safe. The Hindus told me, "Your Christian God is angry at us for idol worship, thus He destroyed our temple while He saved His house. We will destroy our false Gods and believe in Jesus." The same thing happened all over these areas over and over again. Some Christians did die, but everyone told about miracles in which the majority of the churches and believers were miraculously spared. The whole area is now open to the Gospel, which is the first time in history.

A friend of mine in another state wrote to me about his son who was recently incarcerated. He gave him a printed copy of the vision of the seven young Colombians that I sent out some months ago (not exactly a "candy" gospel!). The combination of prison and a dose of the fear of God opened his heart:

As I'm sure I told you, our son has been a drug addict and imprisoned many times. He was on parole here, but violated parole. On Mother's Day they picked him up at our house. He will likely be imprisoned another 8-16 months.

I gave him a copy of "An Incredible Vision." He didn't read it all before he was picked up, so I sent it to him in prison. He read it there and it scared the heck out of him. He's now utterly convinced that he would have gone to hell during this period. Before reading it, I think he thought he was headed for heaven no matter what he'd done.

But the story goes on. He let another fellow, then another read it. Before long they're making copies and passing them around the prison. Bible studies are starting. My son called and asked me to send him the Bible study I've written...

Finally, it is possible that some fish we thought were in Pond #1 are actually in Pond #2. The kind of fish I'm speaking of have actually not rejected the gospel. Rather, they've rejected the candy that has been cast in their direction. They've heard of hundreds of sexual scandals by pastors and priests. They've concluded (correctly) that many TV evangelists are just money-grabbers. They've tasted the hypocrisy of "Christians." Thus, phony evangelicals, more than the devil himself, have inoculated people against listening to anyone who claims to be a Christian. Through sincere and consistent love, however, we can help open hearts. These days it seems that evangelism *must* be relational.

Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest (John 4:35).