

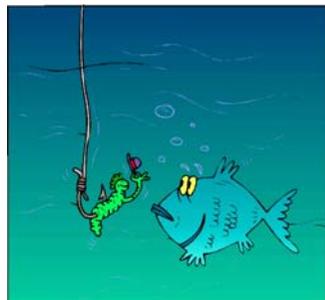
Influencing Fish

by Fred Zaspel

A man returning from a fishing trip was asked if he had caught any fish. “No,” he replied, “but I influenced a few!”

I’m not sure if that makes any sense at all, but it’s so ridiculous you almost have to laugh. In terms of fishing, if you haven’t caught any fish, then whatever “influence” you made is meaningless.

But in terms of evangelism this makes perfect sense. “Influencing” as well as “catching” is a very important part of our responsibility in evangelism. We tend to think that if our witnessing opportunity does not culminate in a decision for Christ we have failed. But this thinking is mistaken on two counts.



First, thinking that unless there is a decision we have failed mistakes our role for God’s. God does not judge us on “outcomes.” God judges us on faithfulness. God and *only* God can save. Only He can bring about a genuine decision for Christ. Our success in evangelism is judged in terms of faithfulness. And you should know that as you witness for Christ *you are successful* as God judges success, whatever the outcome. “It is required of stewards to be faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2).

Second, in thinking that we have failed unless there is a decision for Christ, we judge prematurely. That is, we do not know how our witness, in God’s providence, will serve to influence someone for Christ and culminate in *later* conversion. We cannot know. It might be that you will plant a seed that another will water and cultivate later on.

This is an analogy the apostle Paul used — “I planted the seed,

Apollos watered it” (1 Cor. 3:6). This is how the gospel advanced in Corinth. Paul went in first with the gospel, and some were saved. Apollos came in later and picked up where Paul left off, and more came to Christ, doubtless some to whom Paul himself had preached the gospel earlier. Paul planted, and Apollos watered. But it was neither Paul nor Apollos that actually caused the success. “I planted the seed. Apollos watered it. *But God made it grow.*”

So, returning to our fishing analogy, you may not catch any, but while trying you may very well influence many! We are in this work together with all of God’s people. And who knows but that God may send you to someone as merely that initial contact? Through you God may first capture his or her attention. Then God may send another to resume the work where you left off. Then again God may use you as that second or third (or sixty-fifth!) contact that actually results in someone’s conversion. But it is faithfulness at every one of these steps that constitutes success.

Do not be discouraged or think yourself a failure because you do not see instant results. Be faithful, and in your faithfulness be assured of God’s approval, and be encouraged in it.

That God saves at all through such meager servants as we is amazing in itself. He gives the increase, and He gives us the awesome privilege of being a part of the process. At the end of next week you might be able to say you “caught” a few. Or you might be able to say you have “influenced” a few. Faithfulness in any part of this process is success in the eyes of God.

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