

Introduction

Last week, I read an article about the top 100 advertising campaigns in history. Let's see how well you know the jingles that those campaigns used. I'll read a jingle preceded by its place on the list. You then tell me what product it advertises. You may show your age by knowing some of these. **#1 - "Think small" (Volkswagen). #2 - "The pause that refreshes" (Coca-cola). #4 - "Just do it" (Nike). #9 - "Does she or doesn't she?" (Clairol). #15 - "Good to the last drop" (Maxwell House Coffee). #16 - "99 and 44/100% pure" (Ivory Soap). #24 - "Have it your way" (Burger King). #40 - "Takes a licking and keeps on ticking" (Timex Watch). And #47 - "Where's the Beef" (Wendy's).** Madison Avenue, the American advertising industry, is amazing isn't it? It does something better than any other industry or group in the world does. It **"catches"** people.

And you know what? You and I as followers of Jesus should do the same. We want to rescue the perishing. But we have to **"catch"** them first and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

Catch the Perishing

2 Samuel 15:1-6 is part of the narrative in chapters 13-18 about King David's son, Absalom. It explains how he was able to temporarily dethrone David and reign as king. He did three things over a period of four years. First, he leveled a **"mudslinging campaign"** against David in verses 2-3. Second, he made a number of **"campaign promises"** in verse 4. And third, he acted humbly toward the men of Israel in verse 5. Notice how verse 6 describes what Absalom did. He **"stole away the hearts of the men of Israel."** The Hebrew word translated **"stole away"** is a metaphor there. It means that he drew the men of Israel to himself and his cause (becoming king) with his ideas (verses 2-4) and his influence (verse 5).

In the book of Proverbs, the wise man used the same metaphor in

in two separate verses. In 6:25, he warns young men not to let morally loose women **“capture”** them with their wiles and looks. In 11:30, he declares that those who are wise **“win souls,”** that is, entice people to the wisdom that they themselves possess.

The three words used in those texts are instructive: **“steal away,”** **“capture,”** and **“win.”** All three words, in the Hebrew, connote the same thing. It’s catching people. It’s using ideas and influences to attract them to a person or cause.

Well, that’s what we should do with the perishing. I know that because Jesus Himself commands it in Luke 5:10. He may well have been drawing on Proverbs 11:30 in that verse. But even if He wasn’t, He took the basic concept of stealing away, capturing, and winning and applied it to Peter, and to us. He declared, **“from now on, you will be *catching* men.”** That’s how Jesus wants us to rescue the perishing. He wants us to catch them - to attract them to Him and His cause. That’s what He wants and we do it in the same way Absalom caught the men of Israel.

Catch the Perishing with Ideas

First, we catch the perishing with ideas. Ideas are one of the most powerful forces in human life. They’re so powerful in fact that they can catch people. They caught the men of Israel in 2 Samuel 15:2-4 and are still catching people today, like consumers for instance.

Take the success of light beer as an example of what I mean. At first, it was marketed as a low calorie **“Diet Beer”** that would help one stay thin, which went over like a lead balloon. Think about it. Beer is consumed primarily by men and men don’t like the idea of eating or drinking **“diet”** anything. So some marketing genius came up with a new idea. He called the beer **“light”** instead of **“diet”** and promoted this consequence. It’s less filling, which means one can drink more of it. That idea caught consumers and light beer took off.

The moral of the story is clear. People can be caught with ideas. That includes the perishing. Understand something. The greatest

ideas in the world are those of Jesus and His gospel, which gives us our primary strategy for rescuing the perishing. It's to catch them with those ideas. Doing that requires two things.

First, we must know - those greatest ideas of Jesus and His gospel. This knowledge has a quantitative aspect. Know *as many* of those ideas as we can. It also has a qualitative aspect. Know those ideas *as thoroughly* as we can. The more ideas we know and the better we know them, the more competent we are in catching the perishing.

There are two sources for this knowledge. One is the Bible. So, we learn the ideas that are in it. We then apply good logic to those ideas and infer others from them. The other source is our own experiences with the ideas in the Bible that we've learned.

For example, I read and studied the Gospel of John and found two companion texts in doing so: 8:51-52 and 11:25-26. I learned from them that those who believe in Jesus will "**never die.**" That's a startling idea to which I applied good logic to infer others. It must mean, for instance, that my consciousness and activity never cease, for even a nanosecond. It must also mean that I'll be alive a hundred years from now or a thousand or a million, and so on. Those ideas have impacted me. They've made death a non-factor in my life. I don't fear it but look forward to it instead. Notice the great ideas I know. Also notice the source of my knowing: the Bible and my own experience.

The discipleship curriculum I mentioned last week, sermons, Sunday school classes, and good books assist us in knowing the greatest ideas that we need to know.

Catching the perishing with ideas requires a second thing. We must proclaim. We verbalize the ideas we know to them. To be captivating, our proclamation must be natural not forced. We verbalize the ideas we know in the flow of our conversations and relationships with them.

Let me give you some encounters that I myself have had with the perishing. I'll share their condition. I'll then ask you to identify an idea of Jesus and His gospel that speaks naturally to it. #1 - Condition:

Undesirable appearance, dwarfism. Idea: Jesus gives us an inner beauty that shines so brightly that our outer appearance is hardly noticeable at all. #2 – Condition: Loves chemistry. Idea: Jesus is the inventor, maker, and sustainer of atoms and molecules. #3 – Condition: Hates his job. Idea: There is God-given glory in every job. #4 – Condition: Worries about aging. Idea: Aging is a process of gaining not losing for followers of Jesus. And #5 – Condition: Wants love, peace, or joy. Idea: The condition of life sought for by human beings through the ages is attained in a quietly transforming friendship with Jesus (greatest idea).

That illustrates how we proclaim. In our relationships with the perishing, we do three things: (1) discern the issues that are relevant to them; (2) direct the conversation to those issues; and then (3) verbalize the ideas of Jesus and His gospel that address those issues.

Years ago, I met a college student who was majoring in psychology. I asked him several questions and discovered he was a Freudian. So I directed our conversation to something I knew Freud wrote seriously about - death. He explained what Freud believed. All people, including children, experience angst about death. They fear it and try to cover it up in a variety of ways including hero worship. I agreed that what Freud said was generally true, but denied it was true of me. I told him I didn't fear death but actually looked forward to it. That piqued his curiosity and he asked me why. So I shared, in some detail, what I mentioned before. I will never die – just transition to a new and better life. He was skeptical about that but captivated as well. He listened attentively and even asked several insightful questions about it. He didn't decide to be a disciple that day but was caught and eventually did.

That then is the first way that we catch the perishing. It's with ideas. We know and naturally proclaim the ideas of Jesus and His gospel.

Catch the Perishing with Influences

The second way we catch them is with influences. 2 Samuel 15:5 reveals one of those. Notice how Absalom stole away the hearts of the

men of Israel. He acted humbly toward them. He treated them with dignity and respect. And as hypocritical as it was, it caught them.

That reveals one of the influences that catch the perishing – our behavior. We can attract them to Jesus and His cause by the way we act. Relational experts cite two facts that explain why we can.

First, approximately 65% of all communication is non-verbal. Communication doesn't occur through words alone. It occurs through behavior and body language as well. People almost always interpret behavior and body language as bearing a message. We see that in 2 Samuel 15:5. When the men of Israel expressed submission to Absalom, he took their hands and kissed them. They in turn interpreted that to mean, **"I care about you."** People almost always interpret our behavior and body language as bearing a message. That means it's almost impossible not to communicate when we're in the presence of others. If we don't through words, we do through behavior and body language. 65% of our communication is non-verbal.

Relational experts cite a second fact. Non-verbal messages are more powerful than verbal messages are. If we send a non-verbal message that contradicts a verbal message, people will not believe the verbal message. But if we send a non-verbal message that reinforces a verbal message, people will believe the verbal message. Non-verbal messages, in other words, have the power to catch people.

So we use them to do just that, in our case, to catch the perishing. Receiving criticism with gratitude and joy, rooting for our competitors, joyfully enduring pain, bearing with obstinate people, giving sacrificially, overcoming evil with good, waiting patiently, and so on. Those behaviors of ours catch the perishing. They make them far more receptive to the ideas of Jesus and His gospel that we proclaim.

An African girl named Maria explains how Christians in her country win people to Jesus: **"We don't have missions or give pamphlets away. We just send one or two families to live and work in a village, and when people see what Christians are like, then they**

want to become Christians too.” Those African Christians grasp it. We can catch the perishing with our behavior.

But there’s another influence that’s just as powerful as our behavior is. It’s our being. The focus of my teaching and preaching the past ten years has been a transforming friendship with Jesus. As we engage Him, He transforms our inner condition, through the Holy Spirit, into the image and likeness of His. And from that Holy Spirit created condition, there radiates a goodness that people can actually sense. A spiritual grace flows out of us that catches the people in our presence.

Tony Campolo shares a testimony that illustrates what I mean: **“I remember a boy who lived in our neighborhood after having spent his earlier years in a convent in Mexico. I sensed something different about him. He had an unexplainable serenity about him. When he walked with us to school, something unusual happened to us. We were a bit subdued and even felt uncomfortable. We told no dirty jokes and used no vulgar words when he was with us. At the time, I was already a converted, evangelical Christian, and I had often told my friends I was offended by their off-color stories and obscene words. They never changed because of what I said or did, but this strange Mexican boy was able to influence them for good in a way that none of us could understand. What he *was* had far more impact than what I said or did. The nuns at his convent had taught him to be spiritual.”**

Notice a profound line in his testimony, **“What he *was* had far more impact than what I said or did.”** It’s a reality. Our being or inner condition, if it’s Christlike, is powerful. A spiritual goodness and grace flow from it that can catch the perishing.

Conclusion

I close the way I opened – with a jingle. **“Catch the perishing.”** Know and proclaim the ideas of Jesus and His gospel, behave like Jesus, and be like Jesus. We’ll live out that our jingle if we do.