

PURPLE FISH

Group Leader's Guide

Mark O. Wilson

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INTRODUCTION

This study will help the members of your group gain a fresh perspective on sharing Jesus with others. As you go through these lessons, you will experience new insights into God’s love for people, remember the joy of serving Jesus, and learn several practical ways to engage people in spiritual conversations. You will even get to put what you learn into practice.

The ancient merchants of Tyre sailed the high seas and plumbed their depths in search of a rare shellfish, valued for its rich, purple dye. The Greek word *kalchaino* means in search of the purple fish.

Like the search for the purple fish, Jesus goes to remarkable lengths in seeking his most valued treasure: lost, broken, hurting, oppressed people. And he invites us on a grand adventure to help him connect with these purple fish too. This study will cause you to rethink what it means to bring lost people to Jesus. It will leave readers saying, “I haven’t thought of it that way before. I can do that!”

Grab your spiritual fishing pole and come along!

You will find more questions in this guide than you can possibly cover in a six-week study. Some groups may wish to take a longer time in covering the material.

If you wish to complete the study in six weeks, you will need to pick and choose which questions to cover. The leader can select the questions, or this can be done by asking the group which specific chapters they want to make sure to discuss each week.



THE GREATEST TREASURE

Chapters 1–6

Jesus is the greatest treasure the world has ever seen and we are called to treasure him. We treasure the Treasure through worship, holiness, and mission. What does Jesus treasure? Lost, broken, hurting people. If we treasure Jesus, then we should naturally join him on his redemption mission.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 13:44–46—The Pearl of Great Price

Luke 10:1–10—Zacchaeus

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

1. Why does Jesus say the kingdom is like a treasure hidden in a field (Matt. 13:44)?
2. What does it mean to “sell all you have” for the pearl of great price (Matt. 13:45–46)?
3. What evidence of “treasuring” do you see in the Zacchaeus story (Luke 10:1–10)?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapter 1: Snagged on the Lost River

Becky Pippert says, “Christians and non-Christians have one thing in common: we’re both uptight about evangelism” (p. 16).¹ Why do you think this is so? What comes to your mind when you hear the words *evangelism* or *evangelist*?

I write about a fishing disaster with my Uncle Woody. I also recount a few of my own witnessing disasters. What has been your experience with witnessing?

Chapter 2: The Purple Fish Secret

Purple Fish combines two metaphors: fishing and treasure hunting (p. 20). Which one resonates most with you?

The definition of a purple fish (*kalchaino*) is: “Something of great value worth seeking that when discovered brings great delight” (p. 21). How does this relate to sharing Christ’s love with others?

Chapter 3: Evangelism Misadventures

Have you ever had any awkward evangelism misadventures (either as the evangelist or on the receiving end of it)? If so, describe what happened.

Why do you think many evangelism training programs are counterproductive?

Chapter 4: Grace Leads Me Home

Review the four stages of finding the fullness of Christ:

- see God as he really is,
- see yourself as you really are,
- see yourself through God's eyes of grace and mercy, and
- seek him with all your heart.

Which stage has been most challenging for you? Why?

Describe a time of surrender in your own spiritual journey.

Chapter 5: Ich-theology

What does the quote by Tertullian (pp. 33–34) mean to you?

“The Christian gospel is a person, not a belief system or religious practice. It is neither a code of conduct nor a sectarian membership, but rather a real relationship with a living person. Truth is a treasure with nail holes in his hands” (p. 35). What are your thoughts about this?

Chapter 6: Treasuring the Treasure

Jesus is the greatest treasure the world has ever seen. “We treasure the Treasure through worship (the journey upward), holiness (the journey inward), and mission (the journey outward).”² Is it possible to practice one of these without practicing another? For instance, can we worship but not reach out? Can we engage in mission without holiness?

Discuss this quote from page 40: “He does not ask us to do things for him, but rather with and through him. There's joy in the journey when Jesus leads the way.”

CLOSING

Pray that you will come to treasure Jesus more and that he will give you his heart for lost, broken, and hurting people.

NOTES

1. Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker & Into the World: Evangelism as a Way of Life*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 15.

2. I gleaned the upward, inward, and outward journey idea from Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Garden City, NY: Image, 1986).



BETTER THAN GREAT NEWS

Chapters 7–14

Jesus treasures lost people, and the gospel is better than great news for all of us. This week, we will learn to view lost people as lost treasures rather than lost causes. They are more valuable than you could ever imagine.

SCRIPTURE

John 4:1–42—The Woman at the Well

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

In John 4, what evidence reveals the Samaritan woman received Jesus’ message as “better than great news”?

How can we tell, from their interaction, that Jesus saw the woman as a lost treasure rather than a lost cause?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapter 7: Euangelion: Better Than Great News

Reflecting on the grocery store contest story (pp. 42–44), describe a time when you personally delighted in God’s grace and provision.

Why have we allowed the word *gospel* to mean something less than “better than great news”?

Chapter 8: Lost Treasures

“We write off people too quickly as lost causes when we ought to consider them lost treasures instead” (p. 47). Why do we write off people?

If it is appropriate, share about someone close to your heart who is a lost treasure. Take time in the group to pray for these loved ones.

Chapter 9: A Story Called Redemption

Have you thought of the gospel (better than great news) as a larger story we are invited to enter? What does this mean to you?

Sometimes, parts of the four-act story (created for good, broken by sin, redeemed by grace, sent to bless and heal) are left out of gospel presentations. Which ones are most likely to be omitted by Christians as they describe God's work in us?

Chapter 10: Mending for Sending

Jesus "seeks us to save us and mends us to send us" (p. 57). What does this mean to you?

What difference would it make if we approached every person who comes our way as missionaries in the making?

Chapter 11: Treasure Bearers, Treasure Seekers

How is loving others to Jesus like the great minnow evacuation (pp. 63–64)?

Chapter 12: The Best Way to Share Your Faith

Describe a time when you loaned faith to (or borrowed faith from) another person.

Chapter 13: Two Kinds of Fishing

What is the difference between the pearl merchant and treasure hunter approaches? Which approach is most natural for you? Why?

Chapter 14: Pray Them In

Discuss the Ed Silvano quote on page 75: "Prayer evangelism is talking to God about our neighbors before talking to our neighbors about God."¹

What is the connection between prayer and evangelism?

CLOSING

Spend time at the end of your discussion praying for loved ones who need to experience a fresh touch of God's grace.

NOTE

1. Ed Silvano, *Prayer Evangelism: How to Change the Spiritual Climate over Your Home, Neighborhood and City* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2000), 35.



PEOPLE ARE NOT PROJECTS

Chapters 15–21

This week’s focus is on showing kindness and respect to people who seem far from God. Nobody wants to be a project, but everybody wants to be loved and blessed.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 10: 25–37—The Good Samaritan

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

1. What does this parable say about the importance of kindness and respect?
2. Why does Jesus make the Samaritan the hero of this story?
3. Why do so many church people ignore or neglect the tremendous suffering around them?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapter 15: Honor the Process

Was your spiritual journey to Christ more like the wise men (long journey) or shepherds (overnight transformation)?

Why is it important to discern where a person is on the faith continuum?

Chapter 16: Be a Witness, Not the Judge

Why do Christians so frequently assume the wrong role in the courthouse?

How does it feel to remember your job is to simply be a witness?

Chapter 17: You Are the Second Witness

You aren't the first witness! The Holy Spirit goes first, and your job is to confirm what he is doing (pp. 88–89). What are your thoughts about this concept?

Chapter 18: Be You and Let Them Be Them

God uses both noisy and quiet evangelists. What evangelism style is most natural to you?

Let them be them. Different people require different approaches. Otherwise, our attempts to help will feel unhelpful to them. Describe a time when you experienced “unhelpful helpfulness.”

Chapter 19: People Are Not Projects

Describe a time when you felt like someone's project. What was that like?

Review the nine arts of spiritual conversation on page 101. How do you think this approach would work with unbelieving friends?

Chapter 20: Follow Hidden Paths, Fish Deep Weeds

People in deep weeds (trouble) are more likely to be open to spiritual things. How have you experienced this? (Note the list on pp. 103–104.)

If people are not in deep weeds, follow the hidden path to the river (beautiful inspiration). Review the list on pages 105–106. How can these things open people's hearts toward Christ?

Chapter 21: Respect Boundaries

Review the five levels of communication on page 110. How do we move the conversation forward to a deeper level without being pushy?

Describe a time when someone violated your conversation boundaries.

CLOSING

Close with a time of silent prayer, asking God to show us where he is going ahead to open the doors. Ask for holy boldness to step through the doors the Savior opens.



THINK LIKE A FISH

Chapters 22–28

It is important to meet people where they are rather than where we wish they would be. Seeking understanding and showing compassion is essential in sharing Christ’s love with others.

SCRIPTURE

John 16:1–21 — Nicodemus

John 8:1–11 — The Woman Caught in Adultery

Luke 18:18–29 — The Rich Young Ruler

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

1. What is the difference between the way Jesus interacted with Nicodemus, the woman caught in adultery, and the rich young ruler? (Compare also with Zacchaeus and the woman at the well.)
2. Why do you think Jesus interacted differently with all of them?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapter 22: Seek Common Ground

Discuss the Christian Piatt quote on page 113: “Like it or not . . . you represent the entirety of Christianity to that person in that moment; that’s a lot of responsibility.”¹

What is your reaction to the poem on pages 115–116?

How do you think the F.I.S.H. acrostic on page 116 would be helpful in finding common ground?

Chapter 23: Think Like a Fish

What’s the difference between thinking like a fisherman and thinking like a fish?

Chapter 24: Use Words When Necessary

Why do you think so many Christians “hide behind the skirts of St. Francis” (p. 123)?²

What are your thoughts about Ron’s observation of his Christian neighbor (p. 124): “He wasn’t careful . . . he was just real”?

Chapter 25: Compassion Does Something

Describe a time when compassion led you to do something or a time when you felt it but failed to do something.

Discuss the quote at the top of page 129: “Compassion and pity are very different. Whereas compassion reflects the yearning of the heart to merge and take on some of the suffering, pity is a controlled set of thoughts designed to assure separateness. Compassion is the spontaneous response of love; pity, the involuntary reflex of fear.”³

Chapter 26: Ichthyophobia: Face Your Fears

How does fear stand in your way in spiritual conversations with nonbelievers?

What have you found helpful to face down your fears?

Chapter 27: Draw in the Net

How have you experienced “group fishing” in bringing a friend to Jesus?

When should you ask the question, “Is there any reason why you wouldn’t want to open up your life to Jesus today?” How do you know when the bobber is going under (p. 139)?

Chapter 28: When Fish Aren’t Biting

What discourages you about sharing Jesus with others?

CLOSING

Read Michael Cooper-White’s “Rhythms of Intention” (pp. 145–146). What does this mean to you? Pray that the members of your group will be encouraged and serve the Lord with gladness.

NOTES

1. Christian Piatt, “The Dangers of Evangelism,” *Huffington Post*, November 27, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/christian-piatt/the-dangers-of-evangelism_b_2192677.html.

2. There is no historical evidence that St. Francis actually said “Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words.” However, the quote is commonly attributed to him, and people frequently use him to justify why they never speak up for Jesus. In reality, St. Francis preached with both life and words. See <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/07/11/factchecker-misquoting-francis-of-assisi/>.

3. Ram Dass and Paul Gorman, *How Can I Help? Stories and Reflections on Service* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 62.



FISHING WITH JESUS

Chapters 29–32

This week’s topic is the treasure hunt, following the divine nudge to find a spiritual encounter. The big question for your group is: Do you really believe God can work that way?

SCRIPTURE

Acts 10:1–20—Peter and Cornelius

Acts 9:1–18—Ananias and Saul

Acts 8:26–39—Philip and the Ethiopian

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

1. How did Peter need to become ready?
2. How did Philip’s openness bring him to the Ethiopian?
3. How did the willingness of Ananias make a difference for Saul (Paul) and the entire New Testament church?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapter 29: Tracking God’s Ways

How have you experienced the divine nudge? What happened when you followed it?

Why do so many believers act as if the supernatural is impossible?

Chapter 30: Fishing with Jesus

After reviewing the above passages in Acts, describe a time when you were ready and God sent them to you (or when you weren’t ready, so God didn’t send them).

Describe a time when you were open and God sent you to bless somebody.

Describe a time when your willingness to stretch and obey God made a difference for someone else.

Chapter 31: A Fresh Approach to Evangelism

What do you think about the treasure-hunt concept described in this chapter?

Is there anything you would add to Martin Wells Knapp's discernment process for testing impressions (p. 160)?

Chapter 32: Purple Fish Fishing Adventures

What is your response to the astounding stories shared in this chapter? Does this sound like something you would like to try? Why or why not?

Which story in this chapter grabs your heart the most? Why?

CLOSING

Next week your group will go on a treasure hunt. You're going to actually go out and do the stuff! Spend some time praying that God will prepare you, as well as the people you will encounter. As you prayerfully prepare for next week, consider what you may bring as a gift to the lost treasures you find next week.



THE TREASURE HUNT

Chapter 33

Bring something you can use to bless someone. Actually put it into practice.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 19:10—Seeking to Save the Lost

John 20:21—As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You

ACTION PLAN

This week is putting *Purple Fish* into action. Remember the Halverson quote: “Wherever you go, God is sending you.”¹ You are the second witness. Just follow the divine nudge and holy promptings, and you will certainly find someone to bless and encourage. Here is the step-by-step plan:

1. Read the two Scripture passages from above as a reminder of our mission with Jesus.
2. Spend some time alone in prayer (as described in chapters 31 and 32), asking the Lord where he wants you to go and who he wants you to bless and encourage.
3. Jot down any impressions that linger or come repeatedly to your mind. This is your treasure map. You don’t have to make up anything, just ask God and see what happens. If nothing comes to you, it’s alright. God knows what he is doing. Your job is to be obedient. (Please remember, it’s not about clues, but about obedience to what you believe God is leading you to do.)
4. Meet together as a group and discuss what you sense God may be saying. Look for common threads or themes in the conversation.
5. Divide into groups of two to five people as appropriate and go out to bless the people God sends to you (or sends you to).
6. Stop and visit (even if it doesn’t have anything to do with your “treasure map”) if you feel a prompting from the Lord. The best connections are often unexpected.

7. Remember that you are the second witness. The Holy Spirit is already ahead of you, preparing the way. Go with holy boldness and love. Your job is to bless and encourage, not to pressure or convert. (Be treasure hunters, not pearl merchants.) Follow the nudge and let God guide you.

8. Whisper a prayer and smile when you approach someone. Love the person and make a heart connection. You can use tools from *Purple Fish* to engage in meaningful conversation.

9. Look for a connecting point, then if the conversation opens up, say something like this: “We’re a group of friends on a mission of encouragement and blessing today. We prayed earlier about where we were supposed to go and who we were supposed to bless and were led to you. Is there anything in particular you would like for us to pray about?”

10. See what happens. If they don’t want connect spiritually, then smile, bless them, and be on your way (respect boundaries). Don’t push anybody.

11. Be sensitive and courageous. You will be surprised at how many people are open to receiving prayer if you ask them.

12. Remember that Jesus is with you every step of the way! You are fishin’ with a mission!

13. Keep track of who you ministered to. If you meet a new friend and have a God encounter, take a picture together if it’s appropriate.

14. Share with the rest of the group what you experienced and celebrate!

CLOSING

Remind the group of the eleven suggestions for sharing God’s love in chapter 33 and finish by reading the Byzantine Benediction on page 174.

NOTE

1. Richard Halverson, “You Go Nowhere by Accident,” *The Story* (blog), September 30, 2013, <http://apcthestory.wordpress.com/tag/richard-halverson>.