

WHEN FISHERMEN DON'T FISH

By Max Lucado

"When I was in high school, our family used to fish every year during spring break. One year my brother and my mom couldn't go, so my dad let me invite a friend. I asked Mark. He was a good pal and a great sport. He got permission from his parents, and we began planning our trip.

Days before leaving, we could already anticipate the vacation. We could feel the sun warming our bodies as we floated in the boat. We could feel the yank of the rod and hear the spin of the reel as wrestled the white bass into the boat. And we could smell the fish frying in an open skillet over an open fire. We could hardly wait.

Days passed like cold molasses. Finally spring break arrived. We loaded our camper and set out for the lake. We arrived late at night, unfolded the camper, and went to bed ---dreaming of tomorrow's day in the sun. But, during the night, an unseasonable strong norther blew in. It got cold fast! The wind was so strong that we could barely open the camper door the next morning. The sky was gray. The lake was a mountain of white-topped waves. There was no way we could fish in that weather. "No problem," we said. "We'll spend the day in the camper. After all, we have Monopoly. We have Reader's Digest. We all know a few jokes. It's not what we came to do, but we'll make the best of it and fish tomorrow." So, huddled in the camper with a Coleman stove and a Monopoly board, we three fishermen passed the day---indoors.

The hours passed slowly, but they did pass. Night finally came, and we crawled into the sleeping bags dreaming of angling. Were we in for a surprise. The next morning it wasn't the wind that made the door hard to open, it was the ice! We tried to be cheerful. "No problem," we mumbled. "We can play Monopoly...again. We can reread the stories in Reader's Digest. And surely we know another joke or two."

But as courageous as we tried to be, it was obvious that some of the gray had left the sky and entered into our camper. I began to notice a few things I hadn't seen before. I noticed that ark had a few personality flaws. He was a bit too cocky about his opinions. He was easily irritated and constantly edgy. He couldn't take any constructive criticism. Even though his socks did stink, he didn't think it was my business to tell him. "Just looking out for the best interest of my dad's camper," I defended, expecting Dad to come to my aid. But Dad just sat over in the corner, reading. Humph, I thought, where is he when I need him? And then, I began to see Dad in a different light. When I mentioned to him the eggs were soggy and the toast was burnt, he invited me to try my hand at the portable

stove. Touchy, touchy, I said to myself. Nothing like being cooped up in a camper with someone to help you see his real nature.

It was a long day. It was a long, cold night. When we awoke the next morning to the sound of sleet slapping the canvas, we didn't even pretend to be cheerful. We were flat-out grumpy. Mark became more of a jerk with each passing moment; I wondered what spell of ignorance I must have been in when I invited him. Dad couldn't do anything right; I wondered how someone so irritable could have such an even-tempered son. We sat in misery the whole day, our fishing equipment still unpacked.

The next day was even colder. "We're going home" were my father's first words. No one objected.

I learned a hard lesson that week. Not about fishing, but about people. When those who are called to fish don't fish, they fight. When energy intended to be used outside is used inside, the result is explosive. Instead of casting nets, we cast stones. Instead of extending helping hands, we point accusing fingers. Instead of being fishers of the lost, we become critics of the saved. Rather than helping the hurting, we hurt the helpers. The result? Church scrooges. "Bah humbug" spirituality. Beady eyes searching for warts on others while ignoring the warts on the nose below. Crooked fingers that bypass strengths and point out weaknesses. Split churches. Poor testimonies. Broken hearts. Legalistic wars. And, sadly, poor go unfed, confused go uncounseled, and lost go unreached.

When those who are called to fish don't fish, they fight. But note the other side of the fish tale: When those who are called to fish, fish—they flourish!

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