Catchy Conversations

(Acts Session 27—November 1, 2026)

Title

How many of you remember "***The Catch***"? It's one of the most famous plays in NFL history. The San Franisco 49ers were playing the Dallas Cowboys for the NFC Championship.

It was the 4th quarter, with just a few minutes left on the clock. San Francisco was trailing 27–21.

Quarterback Joe Montana led his team down the field. They were third-and-three at the Dallas six-yard line, and now there were just 58 seconds left on the clock.

Montana rolled to his right under pressure, and lofted a pass toward the back of the end zone. Wide receiver Dwight Clark leaped and caught the ball with his fingertips. Touchdown!

The Catch

They made the extra point. Now it was San Francisco up by 1. 28–27. They held on to win the game and the title.

Well, you know how it goes. Young athletes get older, and before long they can no longer perform the amazing feats of their youth. But they are left with their memories.

Which is why I think Dwight Clark—the one who made the catch—he wanted to make sure that Joe Montana always remembered one important fact from that game.

"***You know Joe***," Dwight would say, "***it's called 'The Catch. Nobody calls it 'The Throw***.' "

And you know what? He has a point. In the final analysis, it's the catch that matters the most. The throw can arrive in any number of ways—too high, too low, or right between the numbers. But it doesn't really matter how good or bad the throw is—just so long as the catch is made.

And then it hit me: that's a fairly accurate picture of what happens here every week at church. *Or at any other church you might care to name*.

Let me illustrate from my own experience. I was at the dentist's office last week, and when talking to the dental hygienist I found out that she attends Hope Point Nazarene church. Well, that was our family's home church for about 8 years, back when Gary Moore was the pastor. Gary's retired now, but she told me he still attends there.

I mentioned a sermon that Gary had preached probably 20 years ago. The title of the sermon was "***Margins***", and it focused on the need to build some space into your life. Margins, where you set time apart for rest and relaxation. Built-in time cushions, so you don't burn yourself out.

I told her that my wife and I still talk about that sermon all these years later. Because it was very relevant to our lives then, and it remains so.

And in that limited sense, you could say that Chris and I did like Dwight Clark. We made "***The Catch***". We caught that sermon, and we remember it to this day.

Well, that's what I hope for whenever I preach a sermon.

I know it doesn't happen all the time. Because sometimes the throw—which is to say my part, as the preacher—the throw isn't all that it should be. A little high, a little low, or whatever.

But the catch—that's your part—the catch is what really matters.

Henrietta Mears was a giant figure in the evangelical church a generation ago. She was a mentor to people like Billy Graham and Bill Bright. And it was Henrietta Mears who coined the phrase, "***Faith is caught, not taught***."

Mears Quote

So to get us underway this morning—we need to talk about making the catch. Because I can promise you this much***: if your weekly objective in church is to make the catch—it will change your life***.

The writer of Psalm 121 made a statement that—for my money—reveals very clearly whether or not a person is in a position to make the catch. Let me read it to you.

Psalm 122:1
I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the Lord."

I wonder—does that phrase resonate with you?

It has been my observation that many faithful church attenders either go to church mostly out of habit, or else they are coerced by a well-intentioned relative who sort of drags them along.

And from that person's perspective, there is a perfectly good Sunday morning going to waste outside the church doors, while they are stuck on the inside.

Well, here's the deal: it doesn't have to be like that. God never intended that these times together should be anything less than dynamic and meaningful. And on occasion, life-changing.

So here's the question—as I see it—in three parts. This is a question directed at born-again believers, people who have genuinely experienced Christ coming into their lives.

But Christians who have—for want of a better term—lost their spiritual edge. The sense of urgency in their pursuit of God has faded. And church has become pretty routine.

I'm talking about how to turn things around, how an individual might find their way back to a meaningful spiritual experience at church.

So here is that 3-part question:

Part 1
First, "***What does it take to have a spiritual life where going to church is a welcome relief, instead of a duty that interrupts my amusement***?"

Part 2
Secondly, "***What does it take to elevate my church experience beyond just being an exercise in blind faith, but a place where measurable spiritual growth takes place in my life***?"

Part 3

And finally, "***What does it take for my church experience to be more than receiving religious information, and instead be a place where I can encounter firsthand the reality of the presence of God***?"

I'm talking about spiritual renewal. It can happen on both a corporate and an individual level.

To a very great extent, renewal hinges on making ***the catch***. And making the catch depends—also to a great extent—on proper preparation by the individuals involved.

At some point in time I'd like to do a little topical series on this. There is a section in the Psalms commonly referred to as "***Songs of Ascents***." There are 15 of them—***Psalm 120 through Psalm 134.***

We will—in fact—begin going through those Psalms as part of our Word Walk reading beginning on ***December 6th***. Maybe I'll come up with a way to do something extra along those lines at that time

These Psalms are especially notable, because their intended use was for people to read or recite them as they made their way to Jerusalem for worship.

Or to put it modern lingo, these Psalms were intended to help people get their souls ready for church.

So like I said, maybe we can add something extra to WordWalk along those lines starting in December.

But for today, just a couple of reminders to apply. Remember, the idea is to be ready to make the catch. To get a firm grip on what the Lord has for us in church on Sunday mornings. Here is a two-part crash course.

Acts 2;40b

Be saved from this perverse generation.

First step—Get a grip on your thought life. Quit feeding your mind on things that bring you down. Discipline yourself to avoid exposure to what you know is displeasing to God.

Wow Doug, that's pretty heavy stuff. No, it's entry-level stuff. The name "Christian" means something. Literally, "***Christ like***". So do what you already know you should be doing, and follow Jesus in this very basic and very practical way.

Second step—Get into the Word, and this time do it for real.

Psalm 119:97-101

97 Oh, how I love Your law! It *is* my meditation all the day.
98 You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they *are* ever with me.
99 I have more understanding than all my teachers,
for Your testimonies *are* my meditation.
100 I understand more than the ancients,
because I keep Your precepts.
101 I have restrained my feet from every evil way,
that I may keep Your word.

Let's up the ante. Make the commitment to do the WordWalk reading.

And take notes on what you read. And that goes for those of you who already do WordWalk.

The latest printed calendars for you to take home are on the back table. But in addition to that, go to our church's website—here it is:

GACC Website
Select WordWalk from the top menu, and scroll down until you find this simple study guide. Just follow the instructions there.

Word Walk Guide

5 words are all you need for this.

Read, Reflect, Record, Review, Respond.

Alright, that's enough to get someone started on the right path. Save yourself from this perverse generation, and study the Bible—together they will do a lot in terms of making the catch when you go to church.

And like I said, maybe one day soon we can do something a little more extensive along these same lines.

In fact, I know Wayne has some really good teaching to share on discipleship that is pertinent to this.

But getting back to the message for today, I want us to shift gears and look at a different aspect of catching. In particular, I want to talk about having catchy conversations with non-believers.

As you may remember from our last time together, Paul had received a vision from the Lord to take the gospel to Macedonia. We'll pick up the narrative in verse 11.

Acts 16:11-12
11 Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next *day* came to Neapolis,
12 and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days.

From what I see in this chapter, Paul's ministry in Philippi operated on more of a conversational level than a formal preaching approach.

There are two specific conversations in particular that are of note in this chapter. One is with a successful businesswoman named Lydia, and the other is with a blue-collar prison worker.

Oh yes—and there is a third, very brief, one-sided conversation with a demon.

To reiterate something I referred to earlier: ***Faith is caught, not taught***. And such a ***catch*** is often the result of a conversation, rather than a sermon.

Let me point out that the ministry of spiritual conversation is something we can all participate in. And sometimes, conversations lead to conversions.

Acts 16:13-14
13 And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met *there*.
14 Now a certain woman named Lydia heard *us*. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.

Luke says they ***SAT DOWN*** and spoke with them. This is an informal setting. It wasn't a speech. It wasn't a sermon. This is a conversational approach.

We see over and over again in Acts that it was customary for Paul to attend synagogue on the Sabbath. No mention of a synagogue is made here.

Evidently, because there was not a large Jewish population in Philippi at that time, there was no synagogue either.

This woman Lydia was undoubtedly a Gentile, simply because of the way Luke describes her: "She… worshiped God."

This was a common way of referring to a Gentile who believed in the God of Israel. He didn't say Lydia was Jewish, only that she worshipped God.

In contrast to that. just a few verses earlier Luke describes Timothy's mother as, ***"a certain Jewish woman."***

And then notice how in vs. 14, Luke tells us that God enabled Lydia to embrace what Paul was saying.

The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.

And so many times, that's just how it happens. No church meeting. No formal sermon or lesson being taught. Just a sit-down conversation, and God opens a person's heart.

I'll bet many of you here today had that kind of experience yourself. You made ***the catch*** during a conversation, and you weren't anywhere near a church.

I think it's significant that Lydia—who in all likelihood was the very first convert to Christianity in all of Europe—Lydia came to Christ by means of a conversation.

Acts 16:15
And when she and her household were baptized, she begged *us,* saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

She was obviously a woman of means**. *A seller of purple***—that's how Luke introduces her. Back then, garments that were dyed purple were the height of fashion for the rich and powerful.

Obtaining the dye was a difficult and labor-intensive process, involving large quantities of sea snails. Thousands of snails could be required to produce enough dye for a single expensive garment. But it definitely paid well.

One historical account says that a high-quality purple cloak would cost the equivalent of well over $100,000.00 Needless to say, Lydia could afford a house large enough to accommodate Paul and his crewas guests.

Acts 16:16a
16 Now it happened, as we went to prayer…

Just one detail here. The prayer meeting that Luke speaks of in vs. 13 does not appear to be limited to the Sabbath day. And Paul and his company became regular attendees. Let's read on.

Acts 16:16-18
16 Now it happened, as we went to prayer
that a certain slave girl possessed with a
spirit of divination met us, who brought her
masters much profit by fortune-telling.
17 This girl followed Paul and us, and cried
out, saying, "These men are the servants of
the Most High God, who proclaim to us the
way of salvation."
18 And this she did for many days. But Paul,
greatly annoyed, turned and said to the
spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus
Christ to come out of her." And he came out
that very hour.

So it seems likely that this girl had been coming to the riverside prayer gathering. That's where she met Paul and his companions. And then she begins to follow them around town, and does so for "***many days***."

I can only conclude from this that Paul did not discern her spiritual state initially. But once he recognizes what's going on with her, he drives the demon out with a single command. *(That's the brief, one-sided conversation with a demon I talked about earlier.)*

And this exorcism was right in line with a promise that Jesus gave to the disciples.

Luke 10:19
Behold, I give you the authority to trample
on serpents and scorpions, and over all the
power of the enemy, and nothing shall by
any means hurt you.

So once this girl has been set free from her terrible affliction, I would assume she was converted on the spot. Luke doesn't say one way or the other. But he does have something to say about the men who were making a living off of her fortune-telling.

Acts 16:19-24
19 But when her masters saw that their hope
of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas
and dragged *them* into the marketplace to
the authorities.
20 And they brought them to the
magistrates, and said, "These men, being
Jews, exceedingly trouble our city;
21 and they teach customs which are not
lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or
observe."
22 Then the multitude rose up together
against them; and the magistrates tore off
their clothes and commanded *them* to be
beaten with rods.
23 And when they had laid many stripes on
them, they threw *them* into prison,
commanding the jailer to keep them
securely.
24 Having received such a charge, he put
them into the inner prison and fastened
their feet in the stocks.

And by the time we get to verse 25, they've had their feet restrained in the stocks for 6 or 7 hours. They had to be extremely uncomfortable.

Acts 16:25
But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying
and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners
were listening to them.

"The prisoners were listening to them."
That's significant. Paul and Silas' act of worship and praise must have had a powerful effect on these prisoners.

But even more significant than that is a detail that Luke neglects to mention: God was listening also.

Acts 16:26-30
26 Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so
that the foundations of the prison were
shaken; and immediately all the doors were
opened and everyone's chains were loosed.
27 And the keeper of the prison, awaking
from sleep and seeing the prison doors open,
supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his
sword and was about to kill himself.
28 But Paul called with a loud voice, saying,
"Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."
29 Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell
down trembling before Paul and Silas.
30 And he brought them out and said, "Sirs,
what must I do to be saved?"

This earthquake obviously had supernatural roots. Its intended purpose seems to be getting the jailer's attention. Because it's time for another conversation.

This encounter begins as a one-on-one kind of talk. We know that because of the nature of the question that the jailer asked: "Sirs, what must ***I*** do to be saved? And the answer, as always, is centered in Jesus.

Acts 16:31-32
31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus
Christ, and you will be saved, you and your
household."
32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to
him and to all who were in his house.

So now the conversation gets expanded quite a bit. Obviously, the jailer's home was somewhere within the prison compound. Which enabled his family to hear and respond to all that Paul and Silas had to say.

Acts 16:33-34
33 And he took them the same hour of the
night and washed *their* stripes. And
immediately he and all his *family* were
baptized.
34 Now when he had brought them into his
house, he set food before them; and he
rejoiced, having believed in God with all his
household.

And right there is the confirmation. The jailer made the catch. He believed in God with all his household. Just like Lydia and her household did.

Now I've heard it speculated on a number of occasions that the man in Paul's vision from earlier in this chapter was the jailer.

Acts 16:9
A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with
him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and
help us."

There is no actual justification in the text for saying that, but it's certainly within the realm of possibility. At any rate, Paul and Silas had to be feeling pretty good about following that lead the way they did.

But the jailer's conversion doesn't fix the fact that they're still in jail. Thankfully, that detail changes rather abruptly in the next few hours.

Acts 16:35-39
35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent
the officers, saying, "Let those men go."
36 So the keeper of the prison reported these
words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have
sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and
go in peace."
(Flip)

37 But Paul said to them, “They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, *and* have thrown *us* into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out.”
38 And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.
39 Then they came and pleaded with them and brought *them* out, and asked *them* to depart from the city.

For what it’s worth, it seems that Paul had no problem holding politicians’ feet to the fire. You see, as a citizen of Rome, Paul had certain rights that these Magistrates had violated.

In particular, you could not beat a Roman citizen the way they beat Paul without a trial and a conviction.

They gave him no such trial. He had not been convicted. They just had him beat to pacify the complainers.

So Paul had leverage to get the Magistrates to come to the jail hat in hand, and politely ask him to leave town.

Which he did, but only in his own good time. First, he wanted to check in on the new converts who were gathered at Lydia’s house.

Acts 16:40
So they went out of the prison and entered *the house of* Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.

And now, having established a spiritual beachhead in Europe, it’s off and running to the next part of this great adventure.

The power of spiritual conversation. That is a major tool in the church that Jesus is building. Paul writes of this a few years after his visit to Philippi.

Colossians 4:6 **ESV**
Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Seasoned with salt. What does that mean?

Let your faith show up in your conversations with others. But he says let it be ***seasoned***. Don’t overdo it. Preaching is different. More direct and assertive. Compelling.

But right now we’re talking about having conversations.

Just make your faith a natural part of the conversation. Do it right, and people will often have questions. And when they do, that’s when you can take it to the next level.

The title of this sermon is, “***Catchy Conversations***”. It’s certainly something we should all aspire to.

After all, Jesus told Peter once: “***Don’t worry. From now on you will catch men***.”

And practicing the art of ***catchy conversations*** is one way to win people to Jesus.

Title