

Professional Angler Becoming a Fisher of Men

The sun shines down on the water as the waves gently rock the boat. Lines are prepared, hooks are baited, and optimism runs high for a great haul of fish. Some people dream of spending their days out on the water fishing, but for Chris Neau, professional bass angler, it's a reality.

When his family moved to New Orleans, La., in 1989, it gave the then 12-year-old the opportunity to improve his fishing skills on the Louisiana Delta. His love for the sport grew over the years and, at the age of 15, Neau attended the Bassmaster Classic at the Superdome in New Orleans.

As he sat among the 40,000 attendees he felt the presence of the Lord with him. "The Lord told me that professional bass fishing would be the way I would glorify Him," says Neau.

Not knowing how that calling would play out, Neau pursued other activities in high school. But over the years, the water called to him as he spent time fishing out on the canal in Louisiana. "The more time I spent fishing, the more peace I felt," Neau says.

Having grown more attached to the sport of fishing, Neau was worried what it would mean for his hobby when his family moved to California in 2000.

"I researched the area we were moving to and found that we would be within 45 minutes of the California Delta, one of the top fishing spots in the world," he said. It was there where he earned a role as a co-angler.

Neau worked a full-time job as he patiently waited and saved up for a boat and truck that would further his fishing career. At 24, the Lord spoke to Neau and told him that he would one

day compete on the professional level in bass fishing.

"I was working at Safeway and was \$20,000 short of having enough to be able to go on tour. But the Lord kept telling me I'd go full time fishing in 2005," he said.

At the end of 2004, Neau took a step of faith and submitted notice to his boss, indicating he would be quitting at the end of the year. It didn't take long for him to receive confirmation from the Lord in an unexpected meeting with his boss. "The next week my boss said that Safeway wanted to offer me a buyout in the amount of \$21,000," he said.

In 2005, Neau made the move to full time professional bass fishing and quickly reached his peak within the first two years. His swift rise to success proved to be problematic, though, as he allowed his pride to take over.

"As a young kid my pride got so big in life that I thought I could do it all by myself. That's when I lost everything, including my sponsorships," he said. In the midst of this setback, he began to rely on God again and felt the same peace and presence he had years before.

In 2010, during a tournament in Shasta, Calif., Neau received the confirmation he needed.

"As I weighed in that day, the director of FLW congratulated me and told me I'd been invited to be part of the FLW majors," he said. The FLW Majors is considered by bass anglers to be the largest and most prestigious bass tournament trail in the world. The opportunity showed him that the call God had once placed on his life was still there.

Neau's second chance message has opened doors for him to reach beyond the basic audience of bass tournaments as a means for him to share his faith.

Participating in tournaments and speaking engagements across

the country, he shares his story and his faith with adults and teens with many telling him that the message of a second chance resonates with them. Churches often reach out to Neau and bring him in to conduct a bass fishing seminar. In the opening session Neau shares his testimony with the group then moves along to the instructional portion of the seminar.

“People in professional sports can reach a different group of people than pastors can,” Neau said. “If the church holds a fishing seminar on Saturday and announces that I’ll be coming back on Sunday to share my testimony in service, either in a 5-to-10-minute format or for the entire service, it can attract guys who wouldn’t normally come to church.”

Neau’s main goal at the seminars is to touch someone’s heart, but also hopes that the seminars will offer a fun way for parents and their kids to connect over an activity.

“It’s natural for fathers and sons to want to spend time together,” he said. “If you can point people in the right direction with an activity, they’ll go out and do it. We provide the opportunity to do this through fishing.”

After an event concludes, Neau can often be found chatting with attendees, providing contact information to allow them to get in touch with him, and answering questions.

“Sometimes people who have gone to the seminars will contact me and ask for advice on fishing in their area. I’ll research it for them and offer tips on how they can improve their skills,” he says.

Beyond getting to share his faith and love for the sport of fishing, Neau takes great pleasure in seeing lasting change in the family relationships of those who have attended his seminars.

“In one city I went to there was a kid who had some learning challenges. His dad wasn’t usually around, but I came out and

did the seminar and he and his dad stayed and talked to me,” he said. “I gave them fishing lures and signed things for them and really tried to show them that they’re special. The following Sunday they were at church on the front row. As it turns out, the boy and his dad are still fishing together and now enjoy other activities together.”

Sharing a passion for reaching the lost, Assemblies of God Men’s Ministries has partnered with Neau to reach men through his fishing seminars nationwide.

“I know that the celebrity of sports figures can often get the attention of men when many of our other attempts at evangelism go unnoticed,” says Tom Greene, Men’s Ministries National Director.

With that in mind, Men’s Ministries recently agreed to become a jersey sponsor for Neau.

“Our national team responded positively to be one of Chris’s jersey sponsors out of respect to the many thousands of our own Assemblies of God outdoorsmen,” Greene said. “In addition, outdoor sports play an amazing role in our ‘Reach, Teach, Release’ strategy in AG Men’s Ministries. We are blessed to have Chris represent us in events from coast to coast.”

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