

catch and release

by Wanda Kidd, CBFNC Collegiate Engagement Coordinator

A young friend of mine has been telling me about her new passion for fly fishing. She lamented that it is complicated to get the wrist action technique accurate. It takes years of practice to appreciate all of the idiosyncrasies of the seasoned fly fisherperson. It also takes a willingness to be uncomfortable in the process. I said why do you do it, thinking that at least she would have a good fish fry for her efforts, but no, she said they “catch and release.” They just fish for fun.

I thought about that phrase, *catch and release*, and how it relates to our mission to and with college students and young adults. It doesn't look like fun for everyone. The students are not often interested in things that we think are really important. They want to do things we do not understand, i.e. video games and texting with people while we are sitting beside them. I am not crazy about their music, but then they are usually listening to it on their headphones and do not even respond when spoken to.

It feels like all I do with students is catch and release. They come and occasionally swim in our ponds for a little while and sometimes they allow themselves to be hooked for a moment, wiggling and uncomfortable most of the time. They do not contribute to the coffers and they seldom express a desire to want to be part of what we are doing in the church. So why do we bother?

I do not know about you, but I do it because we both need the challenge—both the student and me. We need to hear what the other has to say and to realize how we came to those understandings. Our isolation from each other causes misconceptions and assumptions that we state as truths without talking to each other.

There are strongly held beliefs by young people that I do not understand, but I stay in relationship with them so I can ask sincere questions and seek answers. If I want them to see another perspective, I must stay in the conversation and so must other adults.

One of the things that is missing in young adult's lives is the opportunity to hear other people's thoughts in relationship. They listen to a multitude of podcasts. They listen to their peers and they listen to their nuclear family (often by osmosis), but how often do they have the opportunity to hear life-enriched perspectives from someone who just wants to talk to them?

The challenge in relating to young adults is not only to be comfortable with the concept of *catch and release* but to allow young adults to be *released* from what they believe they know and *caught* in a pool of life where they can hear new thoughts. That is where the church can open their doors and welcome the young adult who is looking for someone to hear them and respond to them with wisdom and hope—someone who is not genetically connected to them.

Statistics show that 50-to 70-year-old women are some of the loneliest people in our culture. Their friends were dictated by the parents of their children's friends and those they worked with. The definer of this generation is loneliness, so it seems to me that there is a great opportunity for the church to reach out to both groups and build a bridge.

The older group has skills they can share and the younger group needs instruction. There is a great deal of opportunity for life conversations during that type of shared time and space.

When families release their children—and that is an important part of parenting—the church has an opportunity to catch them, care for them, encourage them, and listen to them.

Why do I still do this? Because I have been downstream and those who have been released are thriving and caring and teaching others. Whether we are catching and releasing or catching those who have been released for a season, God is present in all of our stories and is calling us to share, pray, and love the lonely among us.

