

# Cowboy church pastor reels in bass fishermen at tournaments

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PALMER—Reggie Stewart is proud to be a fisherman. He's even prouder to be a fisher of men.

Stewart, pastor of [J-Bar-C Cowboy Church in Palmer](#), also is president of the [Cowboy Church Christian Bass Club](#).

The bass fishing ministry began at the Cowboy Church of Ellis County when Stewart was a member there.

Reggie Stewart, pastor of J-Bar-C Cowboy Church in Palmer and president of the Cowboy Church Christian Bass Club, delivers a biblical message to participants at a bass tournament.

For many years, bass fishing was much more important to Stewart than Jesus. He fished in tournaments across the state and noticed men who drank hard the night before tournaments and did other things that fractured their families.

He remembered those men when Jesus took first place in his life, and he wanted to find a way to reach out to them.

He took the idea of a Christian fishing club to leaders of Cowboy Church of Ellis County, who approved. The first tournament had 15 teams.

"I wanted to offer a ministry where it would be good honest guys doing something they really enjoyed, but also bring them closer to God," Stewart

said.

The bass club holds one tournament a month from February through October. The entry fee for each team of two fishermen is \$60.

Each tournament begins at 6 a.m. with prayer.

"We all come together and pray, which is really a sight to see when you've got about 80 guys out there in prayer," he said.

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**Reggie Stewart talks about the  
Christian Bass Club ministry.**

Each team returns in the afternoon with three fish to be weighed. Before any prizes are awarded, Stewart presents a devotional.

"They get to hear a little of God's word. We're feeding it to them in little spoonfuls," he said.

Most tournaments now have about 40 teams entered. More than 200 people are members of the club. Some men's wives are their teammates.

The club's rules not only detail the important things concerning fishing, but also conduct. No alcohol or profanity is allowed. Violators are disqualified.

Other rules are unwritten but just as important. If someone's boat motor quits running, someone helps him. If the fish aren't biting for someone, the unsuccessful fishermen sometimes call someone else for advice. In other tournaments where money is king, those things are not as common.

"We also pray that we'll always be a witness out on the water. No matter how anybody else acts, we have to be like Jesus," Stewart said.



Stewart especially hopes the non-Christian fishermen in the tournament will notice a difference.

"Our goal is that everybody has fun and catches fish—that way they'll continue to show up. If they continue to show up to the bass ministry's tournaments, maybe we'll have the opportunity to get them regularly involved in church. That's what it's all about—bringing people to Christ," he said.

"People are getting to hear about Christ on their own terms instead of dragging them into a building where they don't want to be or feel uncomfortable. The other side of that is the more they get to know God, the less problem they have going to church."

Several men have made professions of faith in Christ through the ministry, been baptized and now are regular church attenders.

"We've baptized several of them at the lake. We were on the lake, so we baptized them right there. It's been really rewarding," he said.

It's not unusual for a wife to learn of the bass fishing ministry and to ask Stewart to invite her husband to participate since he won't come to church.

"We've heard some thank you's from some wives, but we've also heard thank you from some guys who said, 'I really didn't realize how far out of line I was,'" Stewart said.

The group has become very close knit, he added.

"The fellowship is just overwhelming. God tells us to share our burdens with one another. It's remarkable, but these guys get comfortable in doing that. They'll say, 'This is what is going on in my life.' I get a lot of phone calls," Stewart said.

About half the participants are from cowboy churches, about 30 percent

from traditional churches and about 20 percent are unchurched.

Some without a church affiliation find out about the tournaments through the [Fishing Forum](#) on the Internet, which Stewart described as like Facebook for fishermen.

While he's sure some click on by when they see "Christian" in the club's name, he thinks others may be intrigued by the words "Cowboy Church." Others seem to think Christians may be easy money.

"We get guys who look at it and see the payout and think, 'This is a bunch of old church people, and I might be able to go there and win some money.' But I tell you what, bring your best game, because we've got some fishermen.

"But sometimes they come and see there's some competition and they stay because everyone likes to compete," Stewart explained.

People who want to fish with the club but did not fish in at least three tournaments last year either have to have a member recommend them, or pay for two tournaments in advance.

"We started that this year because we had people just show up for one tournament and try to take everybody's money, that didn't want to listen to the devotional and then would just walk off and we'd never see them again.

"We want people to get involved. This way, if they pay for two tournaments, we get two shots at them, and maybe that second one will get them over on our side," he said.

For Stewart, changed lives make all his efforts worthwhile.

"I've seen lives turned around through fishing, the rodeo arena—just every place. All you have to do is plant the seed and let God go to work."

The club has been successful in every way it has tried except one—replicating itself.

"Our goal is to get other churches to start a bass ministry out of their church. If it has to be small, it doesn't matter. And then at the end of the year, we'll all come together for one big tournament and celebration," he said.

Stewart noted he would be glad to help anyone get started, and the club's rules are located on its website at [www.cowboychurchbassclub.org](http://www.cowboychurchbassclub.org).

He just wants to get as many hooks in the water as possible.

"Everybody uses that old saying, 'You get them here, and God will clean them.'"

Especially people who have seen it happen.