

# Making Saturdays BIGGER Than Sundays

***How often does a church ask what the most important day of the week is for the unchurched in their community?***

For the past several decades, if not centuries, the success of a church has been largely determined by one thing: how many people are in the pews come Sunday morning? The focus of many churches is that of the worship service, the hour or so that people gather into church buildings to worship and hear Bible teaching. To pastors and staff members, this worship gathering is the pinnacle moment of the week for their church. But in all likelihood, those visiting individuals are not that interested in what the church has to offer on Sunday mornings.

***Let's talk about a radical idea. A shift in thought. Let's consider making Saturdays just as big as Sundays for your church.***

## **For the Love of Sports**

If you take a drive around most American towns on a Saturday morning, you'll likely find soccer fields buzzing with families. Or local gymnasiums, where basketball courts are filled with children dribbling, passing, and shooting, all while parents hold their collective breath hoping this will be the game their son or daughter makes a basket.

Why are these scenes so commonplace in the U.S.? Because Americans love sports. Even those who don't particularly care about sports are still influenced by them. In fact, 95% of people are impacted daily by sports, whether by playing, watching, or overhearing conversations about them.

The reasons for the popularity of sports in America are widespread. One need look no further than the emphasis schools place on athletics to know how essential sports have become to the fabric of society. And regardless of a church leader's opinion on the importance of sports, the fact cannot be overlooked that sports present a dynamic ministry vehicle for congregations to reach their communities. But it won't happen on Sundays. Churches must focus on those days when sports are taking place, such as Saturdays and weeknights during practices.



## **The Friendship Factor**

For the unchurched families to get plugged into the local church, it's not going to happen by a flyer in the mail or witty quotes on church road signs. It's going to happen by authentic relationships.

Nearly 30% of those who came and left a church, left because they didn't feel connected. They never developed any real, lasting friendships with people in the church. Still many pastors and staff members believe that getting unchurched people into a pew on Sunday morning is the most important step in winning them for Christ. What's been proven time and again is the need for a relationship beforehand, a connection that welcomes them into the church.

The opportunity to make real connections is much more likely to happen on a Saturday morning sideline than a Sunday morning meet and greet in the pews. People from the community who rarely if ever attend a church can relax, enjoy themselves, and be open to conversations and connections from local church members at a ball game.

*Think about it:* there are so many more connection points and common ground moments at a children's flag football game than Sunday morning service. There are connections with kids who are classmates and parents who have kids

*(continued...)*

*(The Friendship Factor, continued...)*

on the same team. There are connections with parents who are cheering their children from the sidelines, and some who are coaching from the sidelines.

**By running a sports ministry, you are not only offering the community a chance to participate in a sports program, you're telling them "Hey, we care about you and we want you to come here on Saturdays with your family. We care about you and want to get to know you."**

Friendships are built around sports, whether it's week night practices or games on Saturdays. Ultimately, that's what the unchurched in your community want. 13% of unchurched non-believers say a visit from a church member would be effective in getting them to visit church, but 43% said a personal invite from

a friend would be effective. In a recent article on Lifeway's Facts and Trends website, Pastor Brian Moss said *"The number one observation I make over and over is that churches aren't friendly. They simply don't seem like a place where they want people to come back."*

It's easier to make friends at a Saturday soccer game than a Sunday School class. It's more comfortable for the people in your community, and frankly, for those in your congregation. Many church members themselves are more relaxed at sporting events, chatting with other people in the bleachers or on the sidelines. Often times, Sunday mornings create unspoken pressure to put on a happy face and be perfect, thus making genuine relationship-building more difficult.

## FOLLOWING JESUS'S EXAMPLE

In the gospels, we find this intriguing account of Jesus and Matthew.

“As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this, Jesus said, **"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."**”

MATTHEW 9:9-13, NIV

There are a few interesting observations to take from this passage. First, Jesus was intentionally calling a sinner to follow Him. Tax collectors were despised for their greed and deceit during the time, so for Jesus to tell one to follow Him was surely shocking to those around.

But note where he followed Jesus to. It wasn't to the synagogue. It wasn't to a Bible study or prayer meeting. Matthew followed Jesus back to Matthew's house to have a party! It was there Jesus broke bread with Matthew and other sinners.

When we choose to engage those in our community in areas where they're more comfortable and open, cultivating relationships becomes much easier.

Think of it this way. Your neighbor has been asking you for months to come over and hear him pitch you his "amazing business opportunity." You come up with a variety of excuses to not go, when really you just don't want to feel pressured by a neighbor to invest in something.

But then your neighbor invites you to his house Saturday to have a cookout and watch the big game. Now we're talking! After all, you both like sports, and there's food, and it's fun to hang out with someone you have common interests with!

## THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

*If the mission of your church is making disciples, then your methods need to involve getting people "plugged in". Giving time on both Sunday and Saturday is certainly a sacrifice, but for the sake of your community and your church, the cost is well worth it.*