

**It is all about the weekend...and *then what.***  
**By Eric Geiger**

Over a decade ago, church leaders across the country began to utilize the phrase "it is all about the weekend" to challenge their leaders and teams to be fully prepared for the opportunity that weekend worship services offer. And weekend worship services do indeed offer great opportunities for churches.

The weekend worship service is typically the environment guests are most likely to attend. Whether you emphasize your worship services as a tool for your people to invite unchurched friends or if you posture your worship services as primarily for equipping the body of believers, the fact remains that people who are checking out a church most often do so through the lens of your worship service. If serving and ministering to first time guests is important to your church, then the details surrounding your weekend worship service are critical as well.

Also, the weekend worship service is most often the largest weekly gathering of people in a church. Historically, Christians have gathered on the first day of the week to celebrate and honor the risen Christ. Consequently, this weekend at your church will probably be the largest gathering of Christ followers your church will host this week. Wise leaders seize the opportunity. They know that their weekend services provide incredible moments to teach the Scripture, to prompt people to worship the Living Christ, and to motivate the community of believers to live out the Christian message. Thus they prayerfully prepare for the weekend with a sense of expectation that God will do something great among His people.

"It is all about the weekend."

The rallying cry for greater focus and energy to be placed on the weekend services is warranted. As a church leader, I am grateful for the reminder to maximize the effectiveness of our weekend services. "It is all about the weekend" has some merit in church ministry. Leaders who approach the weekend worship services with an aggressive posture and kingdom advancing mentality have my respect.

*But the phrase is incomplete.*

**All about people...**

"It is all about the weekend" is an incomplete phrase for multiple reasons. First, the mentality can cause church leaders to view weekend worship services merely

as a program to manage rather than an environment where God will transform people. Subtly and overtime the goal can become producing a great weekend service instead of the weekend service being a tool to help people connect with God. And church leaders become program managers, seeking to tweak the program to perfection. People must be the goal, not the program or the weekend event. Church leaders must constantly ask themselves, "Do we care more about the service itself or about the people who come to the worship service?"

- For the media team... *Are those lights dim because we believe this is the best environment for people to encounter our great God or because a darkened auditorium is some media magazine's definition of a great worship service? Are we utilizing media for people or just running a show?*
- For the worship leadership... *Are we singing these songs because we believe God has led us to lead real people to Him in these songs or because these are songs we must play so people will like us? Or not get mad at us? Are we leading people in worship or just singing?*
- For the greeter team... *Are we placing people in spots so that spots are covered on our grid or because we have found the most relational and engaging people possible that will connect with the family who is coming for the first time whose marriage is about to fall apart? Are we greeting people or just greeting?*
- For the teacher... *Am I teaching this message because God burned His Word deep in my heart for His people or because this series will look cool on our website? Am I teaching people or just teaching?*
- For the facility team... *Are we presenting an excellent facility for the sake of having an excellent facility or because we want people to encounter an excellent God?*

While the weekend worship services should receive focus, energy, and attention, church leaders must remember that ultimately the weekend worship service is about people encountering God. Real people. Real people with real addresses and with real problems. Real people who need to encounter the God who has the power to change them and who longs to be personally involved in all the details of their lives.

Please do not misread me. I care deeply about the details surrounding weekend worship services. I am the guy who insists on checklists, walk-through's, and pre-service huddles (see box for explanations). I want the media and the music to be excellent. I believe that the facilities reflect our commitment to reflect the

excellence of God. I want greeters to be in place. But all of the aforementioned must be so that people will be impacted not just so the production of the weekend will be accomplished.

### **Checklists, Walk-through's, and pre-service huddles**

It is because of people, that churches should have checklists, walk-through's, and pre-service huddles for their weekend worship services. They help leaders offer their best to God for the benefit of people, remind volunteers of the importance behind all the details, and also free the leaders to be relational with people instead of running around at the last moment in a chaotic frenzy.

**Checklists:** A checklist helps ensure re-occurring details are automatically and quickly executed instead of someone needing to remember all of the details for each weekend service. Checklists allow energy to be placed on execution instead of design in the critical time before the worship service begins. In essence, the system manages the details instead of a rotating group of people, which promotes consistency. Depending on the size of the church some important checklists could include: media checklists (for all elements of media utilized), facility checklists, information center checklists, etc.

**Walk-through:** There should be a walk-through of the entire service with point people from every area involved in the worship service. If the music team does a walk-through separate from the usher team or the media team, then elements of the service involving multiple teams will suffer. Walk-throughs must involve all teams.

**Pre-service huddle:** The pre-service huddle is a time where everyone gathers for prayer and encouragement and is reminded of the *why* behind all that is and has taken place. A visionary voice must remind the volunteers that all of the details are ultimately because of God and for people.

### **The weekend for people...**

The Pharisees in Jesus' day were great program managers.

I am sure they did not begin that way. Surely some of them began their religious pursuit with pure motivations. Pharisee literally means "the separated ones," and

they desired to live righteous lives. They had extensive checklists to manage their faith, but they traded in the spirit of the law for the letter of the law. They sought righteousness in their own goodness and ability to conform to man-made regulations and lists rather than in the grace of God.

As great program managers, the Pharisees worked very hard to be sure the Sabbath (the weekend) was executed perfectly.

While one of the Ten Commandments instructed Israel to *remember the Sabbath and keep it holy*, in typical Pharisee fashion, the Pharisees devised an elaborate man-made system of what a true Sabbath would be. They developed thousands of laws in relation to the Sabbath; therefore, the intended day of rest became burdensome as people worried constantly if they were violating one of the rules. For example, the Pharisees insisted that baths could not be taken because water might spill on the floor causing a person to accidentally wash the floor when the mess was cleaned up, which would subsequently be work and a grave violation the Sabbath. A woman would not be allowed to look in the mirror on the Sabbath because if she looked in the mirror, she may see a gray hair and be tempted to pull it out, which would be work and a violation of the Sabbath. False teeth could not be worn on the Sabbath because they exceeded the weight limit and would be a burden, as a person was not allowed to carry a load heavier than a dry fig on the Sabbath.

Jesus confronted the hardened hearts and ridiculous rules of the Pharisees and reminded them that, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27)

*Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.* God gave the Sabbath for the benefit of His people. The original purpose of the Sabbath was so God's people would be able to rest and reflect on His goodness to them. The foundation of the Sabbath was a relationship with God, a time to rest in God. But the Pharisees lost the spirit of the Sabbath. Man served the Sabbath instead of the Sabbath serving man. Over time, the Pharisees trusted in their lists instead of trusting in God. They were able to manage the Sabbath so tightly without an encounter with God. They became so blinded by their system that they missed God. So much so that they did not recognize Him when He walked this planet in front of their eyes.

Perhaps Jesus would remind us, "Your weekend services are for man, not man for your weekend services. Do not lose the heart behind your weekend services. They exist so people will encounter Me."

*It is all about the weekend.* The leaders I know who use the phrase possess hearts that beat passionately for people. And a desire for people to encounter

God each weekend is assumed in the phrase. Hopefully a heart and passion for people is deeply embedded in your personal meaning and interpretation of the phrase, "it is all about the weekend." If not, then lose the phrase. Because ultimately, it is not all about the weekend. It is all about people.

### **Not the end...**

Second, "it is all about the weekend" is an incomplete phrase because the mindset can inadvertently cause leaders to believe the weekend is the end of church ministry. Success can become producing a bigger and better weekend service, as if the weekend service is the culmination of local church ministry.

If it is only about the weekend, what about moving people to living in authentic and biblical community where they are known and cared for by others?

If it is only about the weekend, what about unleashing people to live on mission in the culture as salt and light to transform the world around them?

The weekend service must not be the end. It must not be treated as a cul-de-sac where people reach a final destination and live stuck in their faith. The weekend service is a great beginning point, but ultimately you should want to move and nudge your people on to greater levels of commitment. Your weekend services should be viewed as a strategic environment in your church's process of making disciples. Not the strategic environment.

*Think onramp not cul-de-sac.*

An extension to the phrase would be helpful; *it is all about the weekend, then what?* People attend your weekend services, then what? What are you seeking to move people to next? What environments, other than the weekend service, do you view as essential in making disciples in your ministry context?

If you desire to shepherd people towards biblical community, then your weekend service should encourage movement to that next step. In your context, perhaps you utilize the environment of a small group, a class, or a Bible Fellowship to help people nurture community. If you desire to move people to mission engagement, then your weekend service should help facilitate mission. In your context, your mission environment might be volunteering through a local mission partnership or participating in an outreach program your church offers.

Think for a moment. People will be at your church this weekend. What do you want them to do next? What is the next step that you believe they should take

that will help facilitate transformation in their lives? What is the program or environment you want people to move to next?

How will you help them take a next step?

### **Then what...**

During the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, both the US men's and women's 4x100 relay teams dropped the baton in the semifinals. Both teams were eliminated from the competition. It does not matter how fast your team is if you cannot master the hand-off. The hand-off is essential. The best relay team is the team that masters the hand-off.

In the same way, great church services matter little if there is not an effective hand-off to a next step. People are of much higher value than a baton, and they must be carefully and strategically shepherded to a next step.

In the context where I serve as executive pastor, Christ Fellowship in Miami, we seek to move people through our discipleship process. We strategically utilize programs along our discipleship process that we believe are the best environments for God to transform people: Connect to God (worship services), connect to others (small groups), connect to ministry (volunteer teams), and connect to the world (mission engagement). As you can see, our worship services are very important, but they are the beginning not the end. And we must do more than offer great programs/environments within our process. We must facilitate effective hand-offs between the programs. Since we desire to move people from our weekend services to small groups and other essential environments, our weekend services must include effective hand-offs.

As a staff, we defined what an effective hand-off looks like. Some of the thinking came from our team, some from research and writing I did with Dr. Rainer in *Simple Church*, and some from Andy Stanley's book, *Seven Practices of Effective Ministry*. We concluded that hand-offs from our weekend service must be obvious, easy, and relational.

Obvious: Do people know what the next step is? When someone is attending our weekend service, do we make it clear what we want him/her to do next? For your next steps to be obvious, you need to offer very few next steps. The more you offer, the less meaning any of them have.

Easy: Can the person easily engage in the next step? Have we made it easy for them to connect to the next step?

Relational: Since people move to a next step in the context of a relationship, is the hand-off relational?

### **An example from my context**

Because we attempt to move people from our weekend services to small groups, our hand-offs must be obvious, easy, and relational. We have dropped the baton a ton, as many times as hand-offs have been sloppy. But we are learning...

***Completely sloppy hand-off***: Assume people will figure out the next step. After all, they are adults.

***Obvious hand-off*** (but not easy or relational): A video announcement about our new small group series communicates a very obvious next step. But if people are told to search the website for a group, the hand-off is not easy or relational.

***Obvious and easy hand-off*** (but not relational): There is an insert in the bulletin where people can easily sign up for a group after watching the announcement. But they are told to drop the form in the baskets on the way out. The basket is not very friendly.

***Obvious, easy, and relational hand-off***: Following the clear announcement about some upcoming small group opportunities, people are encouraged to fill out the insert with basic information. At the conclusion of the service, they are asked to drop off the insert at a small group booth where friendly small group leaders are waiting. The small group leaders are able to relationally connect with people.

### **Your next step**

Based on what you have read, what does your next step need to be?

Perhaps you need to realize the value of the phrase, "it is all about the weekend." The phrase has traction among church leaders because the weekend worship services are incredible opportunities. Perhaps you have been approaching your weekend services too casually and a greater sense of focus could help you minister to people more effectively.

Or maybe you have been managing the weekend very well. Perhaps your weekend services are like a well-oiled machine, but in your gut you know that you are becoming a program manager. Perhaps you need to reclaim your initial heart and intention for ministry: people.

Perhaps you have a heart for people with a strong commitment to maximizing your weekend worship services, but your worship services are giant cul-de-sacs with people attending who are going no where. And it is time to think about your weekend services as the beginning point and not the end. Maybe you need to pick up the baton and work on the hand-off.

It is all about the weekend. Then what.

### **Eight Questions to consider**

1. When people come to our weekend worship service(s), what do we ultimately want to see happen in their lives?
2. How does our weekend worship services fit into our overall church ministry vision?
3. How can we increase the effectiveness of our weekend worship service(s) in light of our ministry vision?
4. In what areas/departments, do we need to implement ministry checklists or ministry walk-through's?
5. When people attend the weekly worship service(s), what is the next step (programmatically) that you would like for people to take? In other words, what program (choose one) would you like the people to attend next?
6. Is the next step obvious?
7. Is the next step easy? How can we make the next step easier?
8. Is the next step relational? How can we make the next step more relational?



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