

# PLAYING FAVORITES

## Pastors: Who Gets Your Quality Time?



*Jesus played favorites.*

There. I said it.

He loved everyone, but he didn't invest equally in everyone.

There were the multitudes.

There was a larger community of disciples.

There were the 72 sent out ahead of Him.

There were the 12.

Within the 12, there were three. Peter, James, and John, who experienced moments with Jesus the others didn't.

The closer you move toward the center, the fewer people you find and the greater the investment becomes. Jesus wasn't distributing his time equally. He was investing strategically.

That raises a difficult question for pastors:

**How much of your best time are you investing in the people most capable of carrying the Kingdom beyond your church?**

Not just how much time. How much of your *best* time? The hours when you are most creative, most attentive, most curious, and most available. The time you protect because you know it matters. Who gets that time?

Church leadership naturally gives enormous amounts of attention to the places that require the most maintenance.

Sunday requires attention.

Programs require attention.

Staff requires attention.

Problems require attention.

People who are struggling require attention.

People who are unhappy require attention.

I get tired just typing those sentences.

Meanwhile, somewhere in your church are people who may receive very little attention at all. Not because they are especially quiet, faithful, or dependable, but because much of what captures their attention is happening beyond the church. They are thinking about people, relationships, opportunities, and places that may never appear on the church calendar.

Some of them are already quietly carrying the Kingdom into places your church may never reach: their workplace, their neighborhood, their classroom, their hospital, their coffee shop, their team, their circle of friends. They are building relationships with people who will probably never walk through the doors of your church.

And because much of what they are doing happens outside our usual field of vision, we may barely notice them.

That might be a mistake.

In another Field Note, ***Defying Gravity***, I wrote about the enormous thrust required to escape the gravitational pull of Sunday-centricity. Shifting a church toward the harvest requires more than good intentions or another ministry initiative. The gravitational pull back toward Sunday is simply too strong.

So where does the thrust come from?

That connects with another Field Note I've written, **16%**, where I explored a small group of people within the church who may be especially important in making that shift.

The 16% are the catalysts and champions already leaning toward the harvest.

*Catalysts* are the innovators. They see possibilities others don't see yet. They imagine new Kingdom Expressions, experiment with different approaches, and are willing to venture beyond familiar ways of doing things.

*Champions* are the first to recognize those innovations and say, "I'm in." They are the early adopters who give an emerging idea momentum. They see what the catalysts are seeing and are willing to move before everyone else is convinced.

Together, catalysts and champions possess something essential for a Harvest Forward shift:

*They are willing to move first.*

These aren't necessarily your most faithful attenders, biggest givers, best volunteers, or the people carrying the most responsibility inside the church. Some of them may be surprisingly easy to overlook because much of their Kingdom life is already happening somewhere else.

They notice people beyond the church. They form relationships across boundaries. They see possibilities where others see obstacles. They are willing to experiment without knowing exactly where something will lead. They aren't waiting for the church to create ministry for them. They are already leaning toward the harvest.

What if these people aren't simply another segment of your congregation? What if they're your thrust?

If escaping the gravitational pull of Sunday-centricity requires extraordinary thrust, it makes little sense to spread your leadership investment evenly across the entire congregation.

The 16% don't deserve more love. They don't have greater value. They aren't better Christians. But they may require disproportionate investment.

Jesus loved the crowds. He had compassion on them. He taught them. He healed them. He fed them.

*But he shepherded a few.*

He walked with them. He answered their questions. He corrected them. He explained things to them that he didn't explain to the crowds. He let them watch him up close. He sent them out. He listened when they came back. He prepared them to carry the Kingdom beyond his physical presence.

Jesus did not confuse loving everyone with investing equally in everyone.

What if pastors stopped confusing those things too?

What if some of our best time wasn't spent trying to get more people into our programs, but shepherding the people most capable of carrying Jesus into the harvest? What if we sat with them and listened to what they were seeing? What if we asked about the people they were meeting, the relationships they were forming, the tensions they were noticing, and the possibilities they were imagining?

*What if we encouraged their explorations, expressions, and experiments instead of immediately asking how they fit into the existing structure?*

*What if we equipped them for the opportunities actually in front of them?*

*What if we gave them permission to try, fail, learn, adjust, and try again?*

*What if we celebrated what was happening beyond our walls as enthusiastically as we celebrate what happens inside them?*

This doesn't require another program for the 16%. In fact, creating another program for them will completely miss the point. They don't need another meeting. They don't need another curriculum. *They may not even need **more** of your time.*

*They need the **best** of your time:* your curiosity, your imagination, your encouragement, your experience, your questions, your permission, and your belief in what Jesus might do through them.

So here's a practical place to start:

### **Identify three outward-focused people.**

Not simply three faithful volunteers. Not necessarily three ministry leaders. In fact, you may not know these people very well because they haven't demanded your attention. They aren't regularly knocking on your door, asking for another meeting, or looking for another place to serve.

You may have to go looking for them.

Look for three people whose attention already extends beyond the church. People who genuinely notice and care about those who aren't coming on Sunday. People who have meaningful relationships with those who may never come to your building. People who naturally talk about their workplace, neighborhood, school, coffee shop, or community as places where Jesus might already be at work.

Look for people who seem restless with the idea that following Jesus primarily means participating in church activities. Look for the ones asking different questions, seeing possibilities, crossing boundaries, trying things, and paying attention to the harvest.

They may not be asking for your attention.

Give it to them anyway.

Write down their names.

Then give them some of your quality time.

Buy them coffee. Sit across the table from them. Don't begin by telling them what the church needs. Ask them what they are seeing. Who are the people God has placed around you? What are you noticing? Where are you seeing openness? What are you curious about? What would you try if you knew you had permission?

Then listen.

Don't recruit them into something. Don't hand them a church assignment. Don't turn what they tell you into another program. Ask one more question: *How can I help?*

Then keep showing up.

- Encourage them.
- Empower them for what they actually encounter.
- Give them permission to experiment (and even fail).
- Help remove obstacles.
- Ask what they're learning.
- Celebrate what emerges.

Start with three outward-focused people. Give them your quality time. Shepherd them. And see where the harvest takes you.

Then ask the harder question: *What would I have to stop doing to keep giving them my best?*

They might just be the Sunday gravity-defying thrust you've been looking for.