

What if the Church Played in the Super Bowl?

1 Cor. 12:12-31

Rev. Valerie Fairchild

Let us pray

Lord, open our hearts to your message for us today. Teach us your ways. Amen.

Today is the Super Bowl and I am grateful to each one of you who recognized that there is time for church in the morning before you begin your game activities this afternoon. You are honoring God with your presence. Now, if I happen to be wearing the colors of a particular team, I assure you that it was not intentional. I do pray the game is played fairly and safely.

So, what if the church played in the Super Bowl? I found a piece written by Bobby Earls and he attributes the idea to John Maxwell. I believe this has been around for a bit so the original author may have been lost. But I was intrigued by the approach of comparing a Super Bowl team with the church and what we might learn from it. So, I've taken the piece and adapted it further.

Imagine today that God's church has made it to the Super Bowl. The opposing team calls themselves the Devil's Demons and they are favored to win. But we the Church cannot let that happen. There are five scenes in our story.

It is shortly after 6:30 p.m. and the Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens is packed. The teams run onto the field with bands playing and rockets exploding, and a squadron of Air Force jets flies over. The players are pumped and shouting with pent up energy and excitement and the fans are screaming with enthusiasm.

The coin is tossed, the National Anthem is played. The Devil's Demons run onto the field. But where is Team Church? The cameras pan the field and then zoom in on the church on the sidelines. Oh, they are saying the Lord's Prayer and praying for both their own and the opposing teams' safety. That's the way to begin!

It's now scene one. This is when the church is to take the field, but they stay on the sidelines and only the coach runs onto the field. The coach lines up to receive the kick-off and makes the catch and starts to run with the ball. But eleven of the Devil's strongest and most talented players charge into the coach and absolutely overrun him. It is not a pretty sight. The coach is down, and medics enter the field.

Who is the coach of Team Church? It is the pastor and how foolish of the pastor to believe he could stand against the Devil's Demons by himself.

The coach forgot he was part of the Body of Christ. He forgot it takes the whole body to play

the game, let alone win the game. He caught the ball but had no one to throw it to. Where was the receiver? And where was the one to block the opposing team? Where was defense? It takes a team. It takes the Body of Christ, each working together in the areas of their gifts.

Fifty-nine percent, about 9 million weekly worshippers, attend churches of 100 or fewer. 59%! Thirty-five percent attend churches between 100 and 500 and only 6% attend churches over 500. The average attendance is 186. The median, the point where half of the churches are smaller and half are larger, is 75 people in weekly worship. We average above the median. -NCS study of Protestant churches by size,  
[http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast\\_facts.html](http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html).

It is speculated that the fifty-nine percent of churches that hover below the 100 mark do so because that is the number of people a pastor alone can effectively serve. The pastor is one part of the Body of Christ. The body is ineffective if all the parts don't work together. The ministry of the church must be shared with laity and the pastor for best results.

Scene two begins. The coach is carried off the field on a stretcher. The team is standing on the sidelines realizing they've got to get into the game. So, they run out on the field and huddle together. And they huddle, and huddle, and huddle. The

referee throws a flag. The church is penalized for delay of game and suffer a five-yard penalty.

Team Church goes back into their huddle, and again, they huddle and huddle. The ref blows his whistle, throws down his flag again, and Team Church receives another five-yard penalty for delay of game. Now the crowd begins to boo. They paid big bucks to watch this game.

What's going on? Why is the church staying in their huddle? The media extends a boom mic over the huddle and we hear, "I sure love this group of people. We are amazing together." Another says, "I love the closeness and fellowship we share." And pretty soon, Team Church breaks out into song together.

The truth is, we like our huddles. It's safe there. The world can be pretty scary, and we've been warned by pastor Valerie not to get drawn into the false wisdom of the world. And, we are much less likely to get hurt in the game if we stay in the huddle.

I knew a church that was stuck in the huddle. I was invited to 'fill the pulpit' even before I went to seminary and drove to another town about once every other month to bring the message to 8-12 people in a very pretty church building. They were the remaining congregation that had been on a pastor search for a couple of years. They needed a tent maker, a pastor who could work for

them part time and find work locally to supplement their income. They weren't having much luck.

Each Sunday after worship they had a potluck meal together and I was invited to join them. The church was located in a community that was rapidly growing around them. I started making suggestions of things they might do to reach into their new community and invite people. They had Bible study one day a week, and I asked if anyone ever invited people to it. They hadn't. They had a book club that read a book and then got together to discuss it. I asked if they ever invited people to join that. They hadn't. I asked if they ever invited anyone to their Sunday lunch. They hadn't.

The reason they gave was, "We're waiting to see what the new pastor wants to do." I suggested that the new pastor would love it if they invited people to connect with different activities. Sadly, they couldn't break out of their huddle.

John Maxwell, in his TEAM ministry plan, expressed concern about the growing numbers of what he calls passive parishioners. He said these are people who come and soak in the preaching but fail to move beyond being spectators. He commented that there was great untapped potential in the church. So many people aren't using their God given gifts. They don't translate the Christian teaching into actual practice in their lives. Many

grow older as people but don't grow up into the best that God designed them to be.

As our scripture reads, "**Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.**" (1 Cor. 12:27) Each person is part of the body and every part is needed for the good of the body. God has brought together people with all the gifts the church body needs. The problem is, we don't all use our gifts or even recognize our gifts.

The thing with the huddle is that when we hang there too long, we start finding fault with each other. The church I shared about bickered over every potential candidate for pastor.

It's scene three back on the field. Someone complains, "Why do you always get to be quarterback? I'm just as good." And someone else complains, "I want your number. That used to be my number." And someone else says, "Let's change the name of our team," or the color of our uniforms, or our rallying cry, and their huddle changes to a frustrated group who can't accomplish anything and the fans are frustrated waiting for the game to resume.

They need a team leader. In football, it is the quarterback. When you're in the huddle, the quarterback calls the play. To be a winning church, each needs to execute his responsibilities under the leadership God raises up.

And the team needs a cause worth fighting for. In the Super Bowl, two teams battle for the right to be called “the best in the NFL.” And, yes, there is money too.

What is the cause for the church to get behind? We are commissioned to make disciples of Jesus. We must be united in growing as disciples and raising up new disciples.

Next, it is important that each understand that *everyone* is needed. Team players learn early that every individual player has a role and every role is essential to the team as a whole. The church must play together as a team – Team Jesus.

**“The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!”** (1 Cor. 12:21) Often in football, it is the quarterback who gets the press following a win. But he can’t get the ball and have an opening to run unless the blockers do their job keeping the opposing team at bay. The receiver may make a great catch, but again, others run interference making it possible for the receiver to be in the right part of the field to make the catch. It takes a team!

It is the same for the church. It takes everyone to accomplish the work of God’s Kingdom. Church isn’t a solo sport.

Scene four. Team Church breaks out of their huddle, but they haven’t practiced. They haven’t

watched film of their opponents. They haven’t put together a game plan. Here’s the thing, we can only play as well as we practice. And too often, we expect a small group to take all the action, whether gifted accordingly or not.

Here’s how it often plays out. Someone is needed for a task so someone else suggests that Sister-Do-It-All be given the task. Two minutes ahead, someone approaches Sister-Do-It-All saying something like, “The Lord has laid it on our hearts that you ought to do this important task and you’ll figure it out on your own. Thanks!” Poor Sister-Do-It-All is shoved into the task and forced to balance it on top of all the other tasks this person already has.

Do you know why some people refuse leadership in the church? Too often it is because they got dumped on instead of learning to share the tasks with others.

Scene five. Halftime finally comes and Team Church drags itself to the locker room bruised and embarrassed. To their surprise the coach is back and he’s ready with a confession and a pep talk.

His confession might sound like my own to you. I have failed to equip you well to be Team Church. I know many of you hold back because you don’t feel equipped or gifted. Too often I’ve picked up the tasks when I should have been

helping you claim your God given gifts. Or I have piled the tasks on those who say 'yes.' I should have been helping you discover the joy of serving as part of Team Church for the glory of God.

But, it's your game. God is faithful and will help you to do what he has set out for you. Together we'll help each other learn. We'll grow into the disciples God designed us to be. God believes in us. I believe in us. I know this church can and will work together to accomplish all the sweet things that make this church the place it is.

The coach in scene five adds, "Let's get out there and win for the Lord!"

The church charges out of the locker room ready for the second half. They take the kick-off and return it for a touchdown. They intercept a pass and carry it all the way for another touchdown. In the front line, Robert the drummer is opening holes for the running backs, Nick, Keslie, and Ian. The retired pastors have the ball. The wide receivers, including the Sunday school teachers, the adult study teachers, and the computer operator are catching everything thrown their way. The defense, including greeters, set up and take down, and hospitality are pushing back the Devil's Demons. Now offense is on the field including missions, altar, refreshment makers, ushers, youth, and scores of others. The church is bringing in guests and God's given them gifts too!

Look at that pass and that left lineman, wow! Everyone's working together! Go, Team Church.

It's the last play with no time outs left and the clock running out. The quarterback dives over the end zone for the winning touchdown. The media might name him the star, but the real star is the whole team. It was a total turn around because of total team effort.

As the Commissioner awards the trophy, Team Church humbly bows and places the victory and recognition at the feet of the Team Owner, the Lord of Lords. To God be the Glory forever and ever.

**"If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body." (1 Cor. 12:19-20) "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body." (1 Cor. 12:12-13)**

Let us pray

Thank you, Lord, for welcoming us into the body of Christ. Thank you that you gave each of us gifts and a job within the body. Help us claim and exercise our gift for the good of all. Thank you, Lord. Amen