



G1OUTDOORS

# 5 Benefits of an Adventure Sports Ministry



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God created the Earth...ride it climb it catch it explore it protect it

## 5 Benefits of an Adventure Ministry

### 1. REACH MORE

**Adventure Enthusiasts people are a “Lost People Group” and deserve their own missionaries.** At many churches, the only missionaries are the ones who are going off to foreign countries on short- or long-term missions to reach people who are far away and far from God. But there are lost people amongst us. They live next door, they work down the hall, they have that RV or trailer full of dirt bikes parked on the side of their home. They work hard then they play hard. They live for the weekends and vacation when they can escape to their own jungle. They have their own language and culture, and church is not part of it. “Church? You’re kidding, right? It’s not relevant and it happens smack in the middle of the weekend.”

The crazy thing is that many of those adventure families seem like they are solid citizens with fun families, and sometimes we wish we could be them. Why does church have to happen right smack in the middle of the weekend?



What if we inspired and unleashed the hikers, the dirt bike riders, the campers, and the fishermen in our church to be missionaries and take Jesus outdoors to those people? What if our people planned outings that those people wanted to attend? What if our people simply spoke their language and shared their values but also shared Jesus through normal conversations on a chair life, on a trail, around a campfire?

Bayside Adventure Sports, the adventure ministry of Bayside Church in Northern California, began doing this in 1998. Hundreds of men, women, and kids now know Jesus and call Bayside Church their home. Yes, they still head out on weekend trips whenever possible, but they do it with new purpose and with a larger family, the church.

**The Average Men’s Ministry doesn’t work. This does.** David Morrow wrote it in his book, “Why Men Hate Going to Church.” Men don’t like church because most are designed for and led by women. Yes, there’s men in senior leadership positions but women fill most of the leadership spots and it they are more at home in the atmosphere of talking, praying, singing, reading, & caring. The women’s ministry is successful so they copy it and offer it for men but they scratch their heads trying to figure out why those guys who love their adventures, their sports, their trucks, their toys don’t want to sit at a table and talk about themselves. Why don’t they want to come to a pancake breakfast and hear someone talk at them about how to live life better and heal those broken relationships?

If your church had an adventure ministry with opportunities to shoot guns, fish, ride mountain bikes, kayaks, climb mountains, or backpack, do you think your guys would invite their unchurched friends? And do you think those unchurched friends might come? We know men. They are most comfortable talking when their hands are busy, when they are doing something they love, when they are shoulder to shoulder, not face to face.

Men’s small groups are good. They are important. But they are not the right first step for the average guy. Start with building connections out on the trail, then launch a conversation about real life around the campfire or in the truck on the way home. They do want help. They do want deep connections. But they want them with guys from their own tribe. Bring Jesus into their life naturally. Watch their re-creation happen through recreation in God’s Creation.

**Active unchurched individuals and families would come to your church if they knew you were there.** People do want connections. They want to belong. But for many active men and women, they either didn’t have any experience with church when they were growing up or the experience they had was not positive. They perceive churches to be irrelevant and the people in them to be judgmental and sedentary. They are so wrong, but who is going to show them?

Meetup is an amazing service used by over 56 million people to organize online groups that host in-person events for people with similar interests. For the first time in its recorded history, “friends” is the #1 most searched keyword for Meetup events, when previously it wasn’t in the top ten of search terms. By contrast, in 2020 the most searched keyword



was “hiking.” Today, there are twice as many searches for “friends” over “hiking.” Additionally, there has been a 157% increase in the number of “friends” related Meetup groups created in the past year.

What if churches had events designed for people to connect with one another? Outsiders would get connected to event hosts from the sponsoring church. Then when the outsiders are invited to a church that is friendly and focused on loving God and loving people, those people will stick.

### 2. KEEP MORE



**People stay at churches where their friends are. The best friendships are based on shared values.** Most churches have a small group ministry working hard to put adults into groups based on what evening is best for them and what community they live in. But how close to most of these groups get? They start with an opening question to loosen up then listen to a lesson or video on a topic followed by designated questions which a small portion of the group answers. Are these people really friends? Do they do things together outside of small group? Do they call one another when they have some free time? Sometimes. But what if these groups created deep connections and life-long best friends?

What if people first met through organized fun events doing what they love to do? What if people joined others from their church to go camping, hiking, riding, or paddling? What if people spent the whole day or multiple days together doing something they loved? That’s the environment that fosters real connections. And what if those people then began meeting together between events to share life, talk about real issues, and lean how Jesus could more effectively transform their life? Studies have shown that people won’t leave a church if they have at least seven close connections or friends at that church. If we want to keep more people at our church, shouldn’t we help them create real friendships?

**People stay at churches where there are unique programs for them.** In some cities there are multiple healthy churches within a five-mile radius. When the other church hires a better communicator at their church or a better worship leader or youth pastor, what reduces the amount of “church shuffle”? When a church has a unique program, often that’s what makes the difference. If an adult is single and only one church has a strong and healthy single’s ministry, that’s where they stay. If a family has a special needs child, they stay at the church that has the program. If one church has a fun adventure sports program with many options to get outdoors and connect with others, people will stay there.

### 3. ATTRACT LEADERS

**Many Adventure Enthusiasts are natural leaders but are not leading in your church.** Think about the natural characteristics of you or many of your friends who would call themselves adventure enthusiasts. They work hard, play hard, set goals, reach goals, take risks, live busy, live disciplined, live big. They have a “tribe” of friends with whom they regularly play outdoors. Their FaceBook posts are about their latest hike, mountain climbed, fitness challenge met, fish caught, or family adventure. They own high end bikes, shoes, kayaks, packs, and wear labels like Patagonia, REI, Arc’teryx, Mountain Hardware and The North Face.

Now think about what they do in their career. They are probably someone who is leading or managing others, certainly works with others. They are often influencers, drivers, builders, helping others go farther faster. They are leaders.

What would happen if these people met Jesus and dedicated their lives to following him? Would it possibly be like when Saul took his disciplined life and passion and became Paul the missionary who redirected his intensity that had been focused on the Old Covenant and transferred it to The Great Commission? OK, that’s extreme, but these adventure enthusiasts have natural, God-given leadership skills that could be used to grow the Kingdom of God.

**Adventure Enthusiasts want to win in a relational environment.** Think about how traditional sports like softball, basketball, or football all foster competition and result in winners and losers. Adventure sports trump traditional sports. With adventure sports every participant





wants every other participant to get better, catch more, run faster, walk longer, fall less, and get healthier. The environment of adventure sports is filled with hard work, challenges faced, and celebrations shared. Your church can make this happen.

**Adventure Enthusiasts will serve your church.** Many of these people will come into the church through their chosen sport or sports but they don't stay on as consumers. They transition to become helpers, volunteers, tithers, and leaders. When Jesus becomes their Lord, these people take their skills, gifts, passion, and energy and devote it to helping other areas of the church. You didn't start this ministry as a strategy for attracting new leaders, but it works that way.

#### 4. BLESS FAMILIES

When you launch an adventure sports ministry you will bless the families of your church in three powerful ways. They will become closer to... **One another.** "Nothing easy is ever worthwhile." I think you could also say that "nothing easy is ever memorable" too. When families go camping together, hiking together, cycling, snorkeling, mountain biking, dirt bike riding, fishing, or hunting together these experiences bond families. Time together away from hotels, away from electronics, away from the noise of the city means time together in God's Creation, in relationship, facing challenges, and winning together.

We know families who live this way and they are the families who inspire us. They seem to have fun together and as they age they continue to play together. Can we provide simple, organized, small camping trips, rides, hikes, or paddling events that help more of our families become closer to one another? Yes we can.



**Other families.** When families play together, they bond together. Planning events for parents and kids to play together provides a framework for relationships to happen at every level. What's the value of having several other families with whom you can do life? Priceless. Shouldn't this be part of church?

**To God.** What better environment than God's Creation to inspire a family to recognize God's fingerprints on the mountains, the trees, the rocks, and our lives? What better environment to recognize how small we are yet how loved we are? What better environment to have a long, private, and transparent conversation between a parent and a child? The Bible is full of stories of its people meeting God in the wilderness. Couldn't we? Shouldn't we?

#### 5. INCREASE GIVING

An Adventure Ministry will be cash positive. Ministries are not started because they can bring in money, but it takes money to run a church. We know that. Decisions are made all the time about resources to purchase, programs to run, and priorities to fund. Nothing is really "free". But an adventure ministry can be cash positive in less than two years.

Many adventure enthusiasts are in higher paying jobs. Because of the characteristics we see in them (see 3A above), many have risen in careers that are in upper levels of our communities. As they come to Christ and their values morph, they will learn that a Christian heart is a generous heart.

Adventure Enthusiasts support what they value. They are used to budgeting to pay for the best gear they can afford, and they will support the church that is impacting their life.

A Bayside Adventure Sports 2018 study proved that its Adventure Program is very cash positive. Between the generosity of those who joined Bayside Church because of the program combined with the generosity of those who have not left Bayside Church because the program, it's far higher than a 10:1 ratio of giving/cost for the program.