

all things bright and beautiful

— fully alive in God's good world —



PART SEVEN – THE GOODNESS OF PLAY

By Pastor David Fields

Mark 10:13-16; 1 John 4:18-19

“Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God.”¹

I. Become Little (Again)

¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them.

¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant.

He said to them, “*Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.*” ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.”

Mark 10:13-16

³...“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” ⁴ Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 18:3-4

“The side effects of faith is you get a sense of humour.”²

“We ascribe many attributes to God: omnipotence, righteousness, omniscience, holiness, omnipresence. But what about playfulness and whimsy? If you have difficulty imagining that God is playful or whimsical, look no further than two animals that are native to my homeland of Australia – the platypus and the quokka. The platypus looks like it was made up of bits left over from other animals, whereas the quokka has rightly been called the world’s happiest animal...”³

“Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, ‘Do it again,’ and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony.

But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, ‘Do it again’ to the sun; and every evening, ‘Do it again’ to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them.

It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we. The repetition in Nature may not be a mere recurrence; it may be a theatrical encore.”⁴

NOTES

Those who are farthest along the path of maturity in Christ, are those who most easily break into laughing loud and long. They have a 'levity' about them – a lightness – that speaks to the utter confidence they have in Jesus, and the humility to know their place in the world, their place with God, and with others. There is not an overblown sense of self-importance, but instead a proportionality. In that sense they are a lot like children.

We need to ask Jesus for help to be little again; to have that posture of childlike dependence and the joy that comes when we aren't pursuing status, but simply resting in Jesus.

Four Take Aways:

- a. Become Little - because little ones are open. They know that they need God.
- b. Become Little - because little ones are humble.
- c. Become Little - because little ones are full of joy.
- d. Become Little - because little ones live with levity.

II. Get Connected

The 13th C German theologian, Meister Eckhardt said:

"We are born out of the laughter of the Trinity."⁵

God made us to *share in His* love and joy. He made us to experience that same fullness and satisfaction and love that God has in God's own self. That's *why* you are. That's what our salvation is restoring – that relational wholeness – with God, others, ourselves, with all of creation.

Jesus, God the Son, is restoring our connection. I think the logic works something like this:

- A) **The Gospel – the Good News of Jesus:** That God the Son came for us, died for us, rose again and now reigns as king. The Gospel means when you come to receive and internalize God's extravagant love for you, your core identity shifts.
- B) **The Gospel gives us a freedom that means we no longer need to prove ourselves.**
- C) **The Gospel breaks the grip of fear and fear-based living.** "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us." – 1 John 4:18-19

"Pride is the downward drag of all things into an easy solemnity. One 'settles down' into a sort of selfish seriousness; but now has to rise to a [happy] self-forgetfulness....Seriousness is not a virtue....It is really a natural trend or lapse into taking oneself gravely, because it's the easiest thing to do....It is easy to be heavy: hard to be light. Satan fell by the force of gravity."⁴

Seriousness is not a virtue. It's not to say we don't take our responsibility seriously – but not taking ourselves seriously. The Problem is that pride and joy can't co-exist. You get to pick one. Can you laugh at yourself? Or do you have to constantly defend yourself – Prop yourself up?

D) The Gospel restores our joy.

Joy is, fundamentally, a by-product of right-relationship.

Joy is different than happiness in that sense. Happiness is highly dependent on our 'happenings,' our external circumstances. Even our moments of suffering can be the occasion for a deepening of joy, because they can lead to deepening relationships.

Joy does not mean there are no 'tears,' no true lament in the Christian life. There certainly is; but even these tears are not the tears of final tragedy, for resurrection hope lies on the other side of the tears. Jesus can weep at the tomb of his friend Lazarus – real tears for the real hurt of the moment. They give way to the joy of His friend walking out of the grave – because relationship is not lost forever, but renewed.

NOTES

i) **Joy results from being in right relationship with God.**

“Restore to me the joy of your salvation...,” prays David in Psalm 51:12a as he repents after a massive moral failure. His longing is for right-relatedness to God, and that opens up the space for joy.

ii) **Joy results from being in right relationship with others.**

Listen to what Paul writes to a group of believers in the city of Thessalonica:

“For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not **you**?²⁰ Indeed, **you are our glory and joy.**”

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

III. Go and Play

Play is possible when you're little. You can play because you know how big your God is. You can laugh, long and hard, because you know the One who holds your future. It leaves us in this Proverbs 31:25 sort of space:

“She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can **laugh** at the days to come.”

Shabbat Shalom (שַׁבָּת שְׁלוֹם) (sha-BAHT sha-LOM)

The Sabbath is the ultimate act of not taking yourself too seriously. It puts ‘play’ and rejoicing into your weekly rhythm. It helps us make a habit of humility – of recognizing our place next to God’s. It helps keep us little and laughing.

Sabbath an Act of Subversion.

Sabbath subverts those pressures we place on ourselves, or that society places on us, to always be – Winning, Achieving and Succeeding. It creates space to breath – to laugh.

It’s saying: ‘God, I trust you. I don’t have to keep working, keep the world spinning – that’s your job. I can simply ‘be a human’ – a creature.’

ENDNOTES

1. Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre. (27 May 2013). Joy and the Presence of God. Posted by William Ockham. <https://teillard.com/2013/05/27/teillard-de-chardin-quote-of-the-week-may-27-joy-and-the-presence-of-god/>
2. Squyres, Andy. (18 Feb 2025). *Miracle Service*. [song] at 2:24. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wD781cHNQxg>
3. Beresford, Anna Beresford. (10 Oct 2023). *In the Image of a Playful God*. An Unexpected Journal. <https://anunexpectedjournal.com/in-the-image-of-a-playful-god/>
4. Chesterton, G.K. (10 Jan 2007). *Orthodoxy*. Waking Lion Press (First Published Jan 1, 1908).
5. Meister Eckhart (1260-1328). Quoted in multiple places, like: *The laughter of the Trinity*. Alice at Dawn [Blog]. <https://aliceatdawn.com/the-laughter-of-the-trinity/>

NOTES



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DISCUSSION

Open Up

What are some of your biggest 'joys' in life at this season in your life?

Dig In

1. **Read Mark 10:13-16.** In the message we saw Jesus' anger at His disciples for pushing aside the little children. Children had no status in the ancient world, and they could not serve the political/military purposes the disciples had in view.
 - a. How do you personally feel about Jesus' words about becoming like a little child to enter the kingdom (See also Matthew 18:3-4)? What elements of that are a challenge to you?
 - b. How might we be prone to the same kind of 'grasping' for power or control that the disciples were after in this text? (It's worth noticing that the next scene in Mark is the story of a man who has great wealth and status; and Jesus confronts his idolatry of that status – with the man walking away from Jesus).
2. In the message we looked at how the Gospel of Jesus frees us from taking ourselves too seriously and releases us to live with joy (See above for a refresher).
 - a. How have you experienced that?
 - b. How would you like to lean into that more?
3. **Read 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20.** How have you experienced that sense that 'joy is fundamentally about right-relationship'? Why is that good news for you?
4. In what ways does the good news of Jesus help you to be more playful? How does practicing Sabbath rest help you become 'little'?

Prayer:

Take time responding to what you discussed in your study time. Pray for any particular needs in your group. Give thanks that God is creative and joyful; and ask Him to help you to connect with His joy.