

Having Fun (Ludus Dei)

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Date: 04 October 2020

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[0 : 0 0] Some review. We have five values. Five values that set the direction of how we accomplished our accomplished our mission and our vision as a church. Our mission is that we would be thoughtful and authentic followers of Jesus as we join God in his mission of renewing the world, renewing all things. Because we don't believe that God is going to kind of scoop everybody, all the Christians, all the Jesus followers out of here and leave everything to burn, but rather that God is inviting us into his mission of renewing the world. So that's our mission. And then our values answer the question of how we're going to accomplish that mission. So we're going to do that by loving God.

And we love God because God first loved us. God is this God of extraordinary, overflowing, extravagant love. And because of that, we love God too. And if we love God, then we love the things and the people that God has made. So we love people. We love all kinds of people, people that are easy to love.

But what makes Christians unique, what makes Jesus followers set apart, is that we don't just love those who are easy to love, but we also love those who are hard to love. We pursue excellence because God is the God of glory. We talked about this in a sermon, and God is the God of weightiness.

When he walks into the room, there's some gravitas about him. He's the God of glory. And so we do things out of desire to give God glory. And sometimes that's in surprising places and in surprising people. But it stirs us, and it pushes us, and it moves us to do things with excellence. And if you just heard our worship team, you know that's true. And we also talked about living generously. Last week, Joe gave this amazing message about generosity being a sign of being a people of hope. We're generous because we have a hope that things can get better, that things can change. And so generosity isn't just about like giving to a church or an organization. It's also about a posture and a way of life. And then today, we're talking about my favorite value, having fun. Now, if you have been, you know, part of the church for any amount of time, the idea of a church having a value of having fun may be surprising to you. I mean, maybe not.

It's not like all Christians are super dour people, but maybe you've had an experience where having fun was like the last thing on the list for like a church person. One time, my brother and I were visiting my grandmother's church down in Florida, and there was like a substitute Sunday school teacher.

[2 : 3 4] So you already know things are like going awry when like you're going to Sunday school, and it's a substitute Sunday school teacher. And like my brother and I were just goofing off like we're good kids, but you know, we were just kind of distracted. Sunday school, we're teenagers. Teenage Sunday school. Oh man. And as we were goofing off, like this person, the substitute Sunday school teacher, elderly woman, bless her for being willing to like pinch hit for whoever wasn't able to make it.

But she like got so angry, the fact that we are having fun in Sunday school. Like that's what she said. She said, she told us a story about some teenagers that were going for a drive, and the teenager had like his arm out the window waving it around, and the other teen who was driving hit a mailbox, and the kid lost his arm. And the Sunday school teacher is like, that is what God will do to you if you try to have fun in Sunday school. Like, oh dear Jesus, save us. So thank goodness they, we're in a church right now that has a value of having fun. And you know, I don't know how successful we're doing with that, especially over the past like six, seven months, like sitting here live streaming. How fun is that? We're doing our best. But it's an important value because it is center, it's core, it is part of who God is. I've said this before, I'll say it again. One of the most important things about you, I'm talking to the people who are over here and over here, and also to you and the camera, one of the most important things about yourself is what you think of God. And God is a

God who has fun. There's this ancient Latin phrase that gets used a few times before it kind of disappears in history, and it's the idea of the ludus day. The ludus day. And ludus, you know, Latin for like fun, frivolity, debauchery, that kind of thing. Day being of God. And the phrase was that God has a pastime. He has a hobby. He has fun. And he is inviting his people to join him in that pastime.

And God's pastime is that of creation and recreation, that he finds that which is beautiful, or that which is in the ashes, and makes it beautiful again. And he invites, God invites God's people to join God in that ludus, in that pastime. So we'll talk about a few of these things. Number one, the idea that God plays. Number two, the idea that God is inviting us into play. We'll talk about what play is not, and what play is. So number one, God plays. Now again, this is not a word that we often associate with God. God being playful. God laughing. God having a good time. Like many, many times we imagine, you know, God, white beard, thrown, serious, judgy, throwing lightning bolts. More of a Zeus kind of God. But scripture actually talks about God playing. There's a Hebrew word. It's called sekkach. You gotta get in the back of the throat. Sekkach. And this is the word throughout the Old Testament. It means like laughter, laughter, fun, play, delight. And for whatever reason, probably out of an abundance of like thinking too seriously of God, when the word sekkach in the Hebrew is used of God, it usually gets translated as like rejoice. Some like nice religious word like that. But any other context, it's laughter, it's play, it's fun, it's delight. It's that kind of thing. So there's this passage, Psalm 104 24. And I'll tell you, I spent way too long researching this one verse. Because if you look at tons of translations, it says one thing. But if you look at how the Jews, how the Hebrew religion and culture and their Bible translate it, it says something different. So this is Psalm 104 26. This is a Jewish translation of scripture. It says, how many are the things you have made, O Lord? You have made them all with wisdom.

Wisdom is going to be a key word. Just know that. You have made them with all wisdom, the earth, the toll of your creations. And there is Leviathan that you formed to play with. Now any other like English translation you look at is going to say Leviathan that you formed to play in the sea.

[6 : 46] But that's not what the Hebrew actually says. And the Jews get this. Like you look at what the rabbis say about this verse. This is a sign and a symbol and a reminder that God is a God of playfulness, of delight, of having fun. So God creates the world, creates them with wisdom. The earth is full of his creations. And one of the examples that the psalmist gives is Leviathan, the sea monster, a mythical sea monster that God creates just for the heck of it to play with, to have fun with. So that's one example. Another example comes from Proverbs chapter 8 verse 30. And this is wisdom personified talking in the book of Proverbs. And in Jewish wisdom literature, wisdom is often made to be a person herself. And then in the book of John, John chapter 1, John plays with this idea and makes wisdom into the person of Jesus. In the beginning it was the word, logos, wisdom. The word was with God.

The word was God. Now Jews wouldn't say something like that. They do not believe in the Trinity. But they did have this idea that wisdom was this unique character in God's economy that was up to something. And we see this in Proverbs 8. Wisdom says, I was beside the Lord as a master artisan, a daily delight, playing, there's that sekkah again, playing always in God's presence, playing in the world, and delighting in humankind. So in Hebrew thought, God was capable of creating things for the purpose of play, like Leviathan, like anything on the earth. And then in the book of Hebrews, we see wisdom itself, this master artisan creating alongside God, God's daily delight, playing in God's presence, playing in the world, and delighting in humankind. And then Christian thought would later apply what was said of wisdom to Jesus, that all things were created through the Christ, through Jesus, and that what could be said of wisdom could be said of Christ, that God was playful, that Christ was playing in the world and delighting in humankind. So kind of a rule of thumb, and this is like approximate, I think this is on the slide, I've got the approximately equal sign. When you see the word rejoice, particularly in the Old Testament, but this works in the New Testament too, it has a connotation of play, and fun, and delight. Again, rejoice is like this like kind of choral term, we rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say rejoice. And what it's trying to say is, we have fun in the Lord, we delight in the Lord, we are enjoying ourselves in God. That's what it is to rejoice. There's this quote that I love from 19th century writer G.K. Chesterton, he says this, he says, because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. Any parent watching this knows this, any aunt, uncle, grandparent, anybody who's hung out with kids, you know this. 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. And it may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike. It may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never gotten tired of making them. It may be that God has the eternal appetite of infancy, for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father, our God, is younger than we. So let's have a correct image of God in our minds, that God is not a solely serious, severe figure throwing lightning bolts from the sky.

That God, instead, is a God of frivolity, of excess, of do-it-again kind of energy that wants to play and never gets tired of it. Number two, God invites us, his creation, to have fun, to play with God. Now, there's a couple different ways that we can see this. I want to show this in one of the main themes throughout scripture is the idea of rest. You know, the opposite of play often is seen as work, and God is not a God who says to us, work, work, work until you're dead. Built into the very first chapter of scripture is the idea of rest, and God rests not because he is weary, not because God gets tired, but because rest is inherently good. So we see things like this. This is Jesus in Mark chapter 6. The apostles had gathered around Jesus and reported to Jesus all that they had done and taught. And then, because so many people were coming and going, they didn't have a chance to eat. Jesus said to them, come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest. So here is like literal Jesus Christ,

God in the flesh. He's called his disciples. He's on a mission to save the world. And how does Jesus spend at least some of his time with some of his best friends getting away on a retreat?

There's another passage in Colossians where Paul is trying to correct this theology that has built up in the church of Colossae, a theology of aestheticism that says like, if it's good, if it's fun, if you look like you might enjoy it, don't touch it. So this is what Paul says. He says, so then, if with Christ you've put all that pretentious and infantile religion behind you, why do you let yourselves get bullied by it? Don't touch this. Don't taste that. Don't go near this. Do you think the things that are here today and gone tomorrow are worth that kind of attention? Paul continues, such things sound impressive if said in a deep enough voice that even give the illusion of being pious and humble and ascetic. But they're just another way of showing off and making yourselves look important. Paul is saying these kinds of rules, don't taste, don't touch, don't drink, don't chew, don't go with girls who do.

[13 : 23] Those kinds of rules, they sound really holy, but they're not godly. Jesus says this in Matthew chapter 11, are you tired, worn out, burned out on religion? Come to me, Jesus says. Get away with me and you will recover your life. I will show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me. Watch how I do it.

Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly. In other words, we will know what it is to follow Jesus if we feel light and free and rested. If we're exhausted, we're burnt out and worn out, we can confidently say it's not of God.

Play, God has designed us in such a way. Play is helpful and useful and good for us.

According to a couple studies from University of Illinois and, yes, this exists, the National Institute for Play, play speeds up learning and enhances productivity and increases job satisfaction and enhances bonding and communication. Playfulness reduces stress and increases our coping skills.

It attracts romantic partners. People who see you as playful might be more attracted to you. Play is what God is inviting us into so that we can be more fully alive and human and ourselves.

[15 : 04] Play is not just a distraction, like, from the real stuff of what it is to be human. Play is not a distraction from what the real stuff of it is to be, like, a religious or a Jesus follower. Play is actually in the DNA of what it is to be God and Christ-like. So, God is playful. God invites us into play. Number three, what play is not? Because there are lots of things that we can do that feel good that aren't actually good for us. So, two very quick definitions of what play is not. Number one, it's not a means to an end. Some of us will hear something like, well, play is good for your productivity. It reduces stress. And so, like, we'll make a to-do list, a play to-do, a fun to have, so that we can be more productive on the other side. Well, I know that if I, you know, have a little bit of fun over here for five minutes, then I can be, like, ten times more productive.

And that's not play. That's just adding to your to-do list. Play has to be an end. It has to be enjoyed for its own sake. There's a difference between, like, enjoying a game of poker with some friends and some beers just for the heck of it. And, like, being addicted to gambling so you can get the jackpot at the end. One is for a son's sake. One is for a rush or a high or, you know, the need to pay off some gambling debts. Number two, play is never meant to be destructive. It shouldn't be done at someone else's expense. Having fun and making fun of someone or something are two very different things. Play should not destroy something inside of me or part of me, and it should not destroy something that's part of you. And so I just want to set that boundary of, like, play is good. Having fun is good. But when it becomes a means to an end, and when it becomes destructive to yourself or to others, it ceases to be play. Then it ceases to be a source of freedom, rather something that we're enslaved to.

So, what is play? And a few quick definitions. Number one, it is enjoyment. Again, remember the words of Paul, these ascetic rules, do not taste, do not touch. No, God has made this world and this creation to be enjoyed. God, in Genesis 1, made the world, made the things in the world, made us, and declared it very good. And so if we begin, like, the creation story of Genesis chapter 3, you have fallen, the ground is cursed, childbearing will be terrible, everything's bad, you're going to die. And that's what we think all of creation is going to be like. Of course, we'll have a worldview that says, do not taste, and do not touch, and do not look. But if we begin the creation story where it actually begins, it is good, it is good, it is good, it is good, it is good, it is good, it is very good. God says it six times and then one, very good. Then we can see that God gave us things to be enjoyed, not to be used, not to be consumed, not to be destroyed, to be enjoyed. So that's a form of play, a good meal with good friends, a great game in which we can enjoy each other's company and all that. Number two, having fun is about imagination. It's about imagining what could be, the possibilities of what are not right now, but of what ought to be. This is why we as children, we pick up a stick and it becomes a sword. It's why we pick up a pillow and it becomes a shield. It's why we imagine ourselves the stories that are grander than we are. It's why board games are a thing and video games are a thing. It's why books are a thing. It's why we imagine because our imaginations are meant to be caught alive, aflame with what could be. And so when we dedicate to our imaginations to a God who wants us to have fun, to enjoy this world, then we also can dedicate our imaginations to the world getting better, the world being not what it is, but what it ought to be, what it could be.

And when we cease to use our imaginations, when we say that imagination is for children, it's a play thing that we're not to do anymore as adults, then we lose hope. We lose that sense of urgency that the way things are are simply the way things always will be. In the words of Battlestar Galactica, this has all happened before, this will all happen again. Rather, play and having fun and using our imagination is practice for the prophetic necessary work of saying this is wrong, this is where we need to go. And having fun and play, it's about invitation. Playing is best enjoyed with others.

Having fun is best enjoyed when you can look and share a laugh and a smile and be like, did you see that? That excitement of having a shared experience. And so having fun, it should not ever be about excluding, about making fun of, about leaving out, but rather about, can we get more? Can we invite more? Can we make the circle bigger? So how do we take this home? Number one, enjoy something funny.

[20 : 33] I have no realize that's like super basic advice and maybe not something that you struggle with anyway, but like if you're a person who, I don't know, has been on social media at all, you have probably heard of some sort of benefits of meditation, okay? Like close your eyes, take some deep breaths, you know, focus your breath. You've downloaded the Calm or the Headspace app. You've tried all those things. And I know for some of us, like you've tried that and like meditation just gives you more anxiety. Am I doing it right? Am I doing it right? I messed up. Oh shoot, I should start it again. I started, I started, I paid for Calm and then I started like three tracks and now I failed, I have to go back. Like it just gives you more anxiety. So if meditation is not your jam, that's fine. Find like a comedy album or a TV show or a Netflix like special that makes you laugh, because as best as the research can tell, laughter is as good for your brain as meditation is.

So like feel that freedom. Just enjoy something funny. It'll be good for you. Number two, enjoy, I came across this term the other day a couple weeks ago and I loved it. Enjoy a unicorn chaser.

Now what's a unicorn chaser? We do this like naturally in my house. We're like, I like have liked, this past six months have been different. Like heavy dramas and like things that really make you think and just like dark movies and TV shows. And my wife, like she'll watch some of that with me, Emily. But then she'll like, can we like watch an episode of Parks and Rec now? That's called a unicorn chaser. When you watch something like dark, heavy, deep, hard, difficult, and then you follow it up with something like super funny or light or whatever. And like I've met people who like feel guilty doing that. Because again, you open up a newspaper, turn on the news, whatever, the world is pretty obviously like a dark, heavy place. And there's like this sense of responsibility that some of us feel of like, we can only think and talk about the heavy things all the time. And I'm telling you, you will be more effective to fight against the darkness if you have the occasional unicorn chaser.

A good hearty laugh, something enjoyable, something that just seems like airy and light and fluffy. It's fine. Then you can dive back into whatever like the darkness is in your life that has to be dealt with. That's okay. Number three, enjoy something alone and enjoy something with others.

Like introverts, I'm one of you. I know the feeling of being an introvert, like walking into a party and feeling shy. I know that feeling. But things are often enjoyed with other people. And maybe it's not 50 people. Maybe it's not 10 people. Maybe it's like two people. Enjoy it with others. But extroverts, this message is for you too. Like some, like you always go for the crowd. You always go for the group. There are some things that are also meant to be enjoyed by yourself. So like have some consideration and some slow down and that rest that we talked about. Both are fine. Whatever you find most difficult is probably the place where you're going to find some growth. And then finally, enjoy God. Whatever image you have of the divine, of the soul of the universe that is overly severe and punishing and lightning bolt throwing, it's time to sanctify that image into something more accurate.

[23 : 44] That God has fun. That God created you and created this world because he likes you. Because he wants to enjoy you and for you to enjoy God. God is not rolling his eyes at your laughter or your fun.

God invented fun. And like, I don't mean that in a corny way because I really believe that this is the place where holiness is found. Where like friendship is the is the core of our spiritual growth and having fun. It's not just like a fun extra thing that we tagged on to the end of our values because we want to be like a cool church. Like if we can't get this right, if we can't be known as a people identified with joy and with happiness and with gladness and with rejoicing and with hope, if Christians who have the hope of the world deep within them and exuding outside of them, if we can't get fun right, then what's the point of it all? It's not extra. It's not a bonus. It's necessary.

This is why the fruit of the Spirit says that through the Spirit, which remember identifies with God first, fruit of the Spirit is joy. Not grouchiness. Not sinness. Like if you're known for being a grumpy person, you're struggling with spiritual maturity. But if the more we become known as those who are glad, joyful, able to have fun, and not like a fake, like pretend like there's nothing hard in the world kind of way, but in a genuine, kind way, then we are more accurately reflecting the goodness and the frivolity and the lewdest day, the fun of God.