

Immerse

THEOLOGY OF PLAY

On the Go Devotional Guide

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Fundamental Notes:

Purpose: Explore, discover. Grow. The purpose of this devotional is to provide another way for us to engage God and God's Word, reassuring us that God is with us wherever we are, no matter what we might be doing. This devotional is not a substitute for church. This devotional is not meant to replace the focus or importance of being in community with others in our faith exploration, discovery, and growth.

Goal: The last time I checked, none of us have all the answers. The goal of this devotional is to wrestle with God's word and open the door (window) for God to speak to us. When we wrestle, we provide a platform of opportunity to be shaped and formed (like a potter at the wheel) to God's intended purpose. Asking questions on our own, rather than simply take another person's word for it, helps us develop our independent character and grow stronger in self.

Structure: At the front end of this devotional guide are things meant to center your focus. You may read them one at a time and one each day, or you can dive in head first and double team them. The one activity I would like to encourage everyone to take time on, is "Yes And." This activity gets at the core of validating the importance of all we learn through our faith and involvement in church and all we learn by participating in extracurricular activities.

One a Day. Two a Days. Two sides of the coin: As you reach the core lessons, you will find that they are labeled as A and B. Sometimes, there is even a "Consider This" addendum. There are many consistent themes throughout scripture and as we might already know, there are often two sides to consider within each theme. The layout of this devotional is meant to give the flexibility to explore the devotions one each day, if you are away for a weekend, or if you have a group gathered, you are welcome to take each topic in its entirety. The "Consider This" addendum provides further thought to consider and dig deeper. In essence, the hope is for you to use how it works best for you.

Initial Thought: This thought comes at the beginning of each devotional as insight to what and where the devotional topic might be leading. This thought is meant to give you a taste of what is to come and make you hungry to dig deeper.

What Now? This thought comes at the close of each devotional as an ending challenge or question. What we explore and discover through the devotions should not end with the turning of each page. Our growth through this journey will be dependent on our ability to listen and learn and leverage our knowledge throughout our lives. This thought will work to help us build a bridge back to the church or worship community that grounds us. It will remind us of how we can stay connected when we are away, and if the opportunity presents itself, challenge us to come back and share our experiences and discoveries with others. We are all called to be the light and a candle is only as good as the light it shares.

Consider This: This section is for digging deeper. None of these devotions cover everything there is to know about the topic. This section provides additional scripture references, reflections, or stories to consider.

Practice: The scripture readings for each devotional are cited, but you are strongly encouraged to open the good book, open an app, look in the top drawer of the hotel dresser, or pack a bible-to-go.

“Theology of Play”

Initial Thought: When I think of PLAY, I think re-creation, not wreck-creation. Playing is what we were meant to do as children and there is no reason that ever needs to cease throughout our lifetime. Playing is how we learn, discover, and grow and since our faith (spiritual growth) is a journey of exploration, discovery, and growth, PLAY should be an essential part.

Read: Ecclesiastes 3:12-13

Take notes or underline key words or phrases in your bible as you read

Right after the author in Ecclesiastes declares that there is a time and a season for everything, the text above appears as a purpose statement from God of how we are to fulfill our time. It describes what God wants for us: to be happy and to do good; to eat and drink and enjoy what we do. As a matter of fact, it tells us this is God’s gift; a gift that endures forever.

Read: Psalm 150

Take notes or underline key words or phrases in your bible as you read

There is nothing more important that for us to praise the Lord. In everything we do, we ought to praise the Lord. How do we do that? We dance and sing and play instruments and cook and volunteer and laugh and play games the right way for God. Our joy brings God joy.

Reflection: When we do things, we aren’t meant to do them recklessly, but with joy and purpose. In other words, God wants us to PLAY as a way of constantly re-creating the joys of life. An important reminder to us all is that PLAY is not limited to childhood. We don’t outgrow our ability to play. We may outgrow our willingness, but never our ability. Also, we need to open our eyes to the countless opportunities to PLAY surrounding us. We need to be open to these opportunities and allow God to live and shine through us no matter what we are doing. It may be through our PLAY that we discover God the most.

What Now? No matter who we are or how old we are: we should **take our play history**- getting back in touch with the joy we have all experienced at some point in our lives. (When we find that joy from the past, we are halfway to learning how to create it again.); we should **expose our self to play**- “Stop and smell the flowers.” (The world is full of humor, irony, joy, and objects available for aesthetic appreciation. The trick is allowing ourselves to be open to it.); we need to **give our self permission** to be playful, to be a beginner. (Unless you are willing to do that, unless you can let yourself feel okay about going through the awkward stage, you can’t grow. You’ll always be stuck in the past.); we should realize that **Fun is our North Star**, but we don’t always have to head north- some of the really transforming acts of play aren’t purely fun. (This means that we shouldn’t do only things that produce easy fun. If we do, we will be shortchanging ourselves.); we need to **be active and just move**. (Take a walk, throw a ball, do jumping jacks. Physical play bypasses the cognitive roadblocks and builds new neural pathways to happiness.); we need to **free our self of fear**- Fear and play cannot go together. (We need to find out what it is in our surroundings that prevents a sense of trust and well-being that would allow play to emerge.); we need to **nourish our mode of play**, and be with people who nourish it, too- Practice Play. Play is nourishing, but we have to take time out for play, just as we would take time out to eat.)

(PLAY by Stuart Brown, pg. 206- 215)

Consider This:

The following quotes can be found in the book “PLAY: How it shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul” by Stuart Brown, M.D. This is a great book for anyone who wishes to be inspired to PLAY more with purpose.

“What enables us to innovate, problem-solve, and be happy, smart, resilient human beings? Our ability to PLAY.” Life without play is a life without books, without movies, art, music, jokes, dramatic stories. Imagine a world with no flirting, no daydreaming, no comedy, no irony. Such a world would be a pretty grim place to live. Play is what lifts us out of the mundane. (6)

Play helps us discover and express our own core truths. Play is a force built into us through millions of years of evolution; a force that allows us to both discover our most essential selves and enlarge our world. We are designed to find fulfillment and creative growth through play. (13)

Play sets the stage for cooperative socialization. It nourishes the roots of trust, empathy, caring, and sharing. Games, sports, and free play between kids sets the foundation for our understanding of fairness and justice. When sports and games are played as they should be played, organized for the fun of it, kids learn that cheating is wrong and that playing the game the best you can is the thing that matters (although many coaches would rather operate under the Vince Lombardi dictum: “Winning isn’t everything, it’s the only thing”). (197) *Author’s note: The only people who make comments like this are those who always seem to win, or at least don’t lose very often.*

When we get play right, all areas of our lives go better. When we start ignoring play, we start having problems. When someone doesn’t keep an element of play in their life, their core being will not be light. Play gives us the irony to deal with paradox, ambiguity, and fatalism. (202)

In the adult world, play continues to be woven into the fabric of our culture. In large part, play is our culture, in the form of music, drama, novels, dances, celebrations, and festivals. Play shows us our common humanity. It shows us how we can be free within the societal structures that allow us to live with others. It is the genesis of innovation and allows us to deal with an ever-changing world. (199)

Making all of life an act of play occurs when we recognize and accept that there may be some discomfort in play, and that every experience has both pleasure and pain. As long as we are acting in concordance with our central truth, then the outcome will be positive. When we fully internalize this ethos, our work is our play and our play is our work. (205)

What Now? Get out and play. Throw a ball or a frisbee. Laugh. Call a friend and go do something fun. Call several friends and play a pickup game. Put down your phone(s), get out the favorite family board game, and just play. Laugh. Watch a comedian. Go to the movies and get some popcorn. Go to the arcade. Blow up a bag of balloons and try to keep them all in the air. Laugh.

Notes: