

God's Playmates, not Playthings.

Adventure Series: Joy
Advent Week 3 - Dec, 12th, 2021
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1 Chronicles 16:32-34
Nehemiah 8:10
Psalm 16:11, (96: 8-12, 98:1-9)
Matthew 18:1-5
Luke 2:8-20
1 Peter 1:3-9

Everything in your life and in your experience is a gift. People have a lot of excuses for not being receptive to gifts. Some call it humility, others call it insecurity. Either way you come to it, for the giver... it's rejection. So, if everything in your experience is a gift from God then when you 'humbly' decline to delight in that gift, it is as though you are throwing it in His face. Now, that may sound harsh, but God doesn't throw things at you that you were not built to either handle or be initiated by.

People have this strange belief system where they think that trauma and drama are the only ways to learn. So, if they want to expand their horizons, or realm of influence, what tone of feeling are they likely to do it through? Anxiety, fear... stress.

I know it's hard for grown-ups to remember, but there is a purity and innocence to the eyes of a child. They see reality as clearly as themselves. They are not at war within themselves. The Bible tells us to rejoice, but most of us have forgotten how to even approach that, much less enter in. We receive the events of our lives as though they were all trials and punishment. No wonder we think God won't accept us.

Throughout the Bible, God is referred to as Abba, the Father. He refers to us tiny humans as being His children. We must remember what that means. In the Hebrew Testament, He sounds like a pretty harsh dad - always scolding and smiting (I guess that's the Old Testament version of a divine spanking?). But if we can remember our place in the story then it is easier to also see how infantile humanity still is, when compared to a timeless God. Like most children, we round up our age and present ourselves as much more developed than we (likely) are. When asked about your age, having just turned 3yrs old a

few weeks ago, a child is not three, a child will say they are 'almost four'... and human is one big kid in God's eyes.

So, if we can understand our place in the unfolding story, then we can understand ourselves to be just babes in His eyes. A baby or child needs to be spoon-fed instructions and handheld through their explorations. They get a lot of 'No's and 'Don't's. They can have all their (very loud) feelings about that, but they need that structure, instruction and care in order to grow up big and strong.

We also need a very patient caregiver who will hold those boundaries for us, especially when learning to do very dangerous things like... walk. Even though in a few week's time it will be second nature and a totally basic skill, the task, at first, is so complex we can't even understand it, much less maneuver it. But, it is a perfect example of the way to go about things. Children are said to not yet have critical reasoning when they are developing these basic motor skills. So they AREN'T trying to understand it in order to execute the task... they are letting their body do it for them and witnessing themselves do it, then repeating.

OK, so that is an oversimplification, but stick with us... A child explores their reality, but they cannot both watch where they are going and also master the technique. Neither can we. So Abba steps in, holds the frame, so we can lean heavily on Him to get the job done... until we are steady on our wobbly little legs and probably running long before we have mastered walking.

I guess we never outgrow that childlike behaviour... running before we can walk. We like to skip steps and jump right to the end of the story. The full embodiment. The fulfillment of the promises. That's the Hebrew Testament story, the Old Testament.

But, adorable little humanity who thinks it's so big just keeps growing like a weed, and often acting like one too... and we enter into the next phase of development. An adolescent gets to explore their sovereignty in all of its positive and negative forms. It wants to be the authority and won't listen to anyone. The Christian Testament, the New Testament, is like reading the diary of adolescent humanity. Story after story of correcting misinterpretations and compassionate instruction. The early Christian church knew it all and had a lot to learn, impatient to get going like a young adult heading off to college.

The Epistles are full of encouragement for enduring trials and also some pretty conflicting passages about how what's right for one is not right for another (Romans 14), and teaching us how to just respect one another's sovereignty. There is a freedom in Christ and that freedom comes from a ransom that has been paid. God doesn't ask for your

firstborn child as collateral for your student loan or startups, instead, He gave His to pay your tuition and entrance fees to Heaven.

In fact, in general, He really doesn't ask all that much of us. Just to be ourselves, and stay out of our own ways! He designed you perfectly for that one thing... and the rest is just to set you up for success. Nowadays, we would like to see ourselves as grown-up humanity. And in keeping with that development, an adult is not only allowed, but *excepted* to contribute to the conversation. And the form of faith in our times is often along the lines of exactly that. A personal-interactive communication with your reality.

If God wanted toys He would not have made beings sentient... and certainly would not have given free will. In human history, there is a general impression of 'why me?' We seem to believe that God does things to us just to make life even harder. This is how many pantheistic traditions think. But our God doesn't want playthings, He wants playmates!

Even though God knows how it's gonna play out but because the *free will agency* changes what the story looks like, in some Bible stories He still seems to be almost unprepared or to have a different plan than the way things go. Divine design or free will? The truth would be both. He knows the plan and what He wants, but it's up to us, in our sovereign free will to shape the story into what it looks like. He will intervene when He needs to in order to make sure the divine plan is still the trajectory.

And so, the presentation from our current perspective, even though God sees the whole plan, gives us the impression that He is witnessing reality. Although He is the origin and creator of it; it gives the impression that He is not the *dictator* of our reality. God created reality to be self-exploring.

In traditions other than the Abrahamic traditions, there is a belief that reality is self-actualizing and it is exploring itself and evolving as a process. In that, all people, individual humans, are different perspectives that are all relating back to the collective consciousness which is humanity. This is kind of that same thing where God creates reality, He is the origin of reality, and then He sets it off to go play and watches it become what it's going to become.

And so, He gave people free will so that they could have creativity and so that they could innovate what reality is and reality is responsive to those innovations and to God's upkeep and maintenance in the way that He continues to participate and craft and enjoy His playground.

So, as much as He's aware of how things are going to turn out He also let's it play itself out and participates in it and continues to play. From God's perspective, everything has already happened and everything is yet to happen; but from our perspective: the only way we can really wrap our heads around it is to understand it through a point of

perspective. To understand it from the non-corporeal, non-temporal perspective of God no one would be able to follow this conversation because it technically wouldn't be going anywhere it hasn't already been. Until we explain everything from a temporal perspective, even though God is simultaneously not experiencing from right now, He is also simultaneously experiencing right now as though the future hasn't happened and as though the past didn't set it up.

Simultaneously, the past sets the future in motion, the future tells the past what it needs to get set up for success, God sees it all as now, we are never in the future, nor in the past, or even terribly present to the now. He is all... and we are neither... Trying to understand how that one works is really hard for the human mind, trying to explain it is a task in and of itself... But, listen to a child tell a story, there is a reason it bounces around and is usually not linear. They jump about and splice in excited little details to flesh it out each time they need a little support from backstory.

In the Bible, we are told that being childlike is the way to the Kingdom of Heaven. How can you expect to enter the Kingdom of God when you can't even receive to enjoy the gifts in your life? Many adults struggle to find happiness, much less joy in life. We have forgotten how to delight in things. Mostly that's because we deny our needs, so don't allow them to be met. We use the fact that needs are not met as a reason to disown our wants, because a responsible, humble, self-sacrificing adult shouldn't have wants. And most never even get to the point in their story where they realize that they have preferences! Well, what happens if you don't know what flavours you like? A lot of disappointment and missed opportunities.

We have trouble entering into joy when it is manufactured because we don't like or resonate with the way it was presented. But what about when it is co-created?

We celebrate Christmas with presents, yes, because Jesus was a gift to us in what was done through him, but also because giving toys and odd things we wouldn't think to get ourselves- are the joy and wonder of the season. It's easy to lose hope when things get dark and cold, it's easy to lose sight of what we have to offer as ourselves to those we love having in our lives. Those gifts are reflections from the outside to show you how you are appreciated and to acknowledge your special qualities that maybe bring joy into their lives. We rarely acknowledge ourselves or receive acknowledgement.

Thus, Christmas is an opportunity for your preferences to be reflected to you. For some people giving gifts is a unique opportunity to help acknowledge someone's preferences and show them how you feel about them. For some people receiving gifts is an opportunity to feel honoured. For others, the whole thing is a terribly painful process that brings up

every insecurity. Your loved ones have seen and taken notes on what you like and need and deny yourself. It's their chance to meet those needs, including the need to be seen.

Soli Deo Gloria,
Rev. Rynn Parraw