

Readings

Scripture

¹It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; ²to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night, ³to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre. ⁴For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy.

⁵How great are your works, O Lord! Your thoughts are very deep! ⁶The stupid man cannot know; the fool cannot understand this: ⁷that though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction forever; ⁸but you, O Lord, are on high forever. ⁹For behold, your enemies, O Lord, for behold, your enemies shall perish; all evildoers shall be scattered.

¹⁰But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox; you have poured over me fresh oil. ¹¹My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies; my ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants.

¹²The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. ¹³They are planted in the house of the Lord; they flourish in the courts of our God. ¹⁴They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green, ¹⁵to declare that the Lord is upright; he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

- Psalm 92 (English Standard Version)

Reflection

Praying and playing are deeply congruent with each other and have extensive inner connections, noted and commented upon by a wide range of philosophers and theologians. John Calvin filled his Sabbath with both. His reputation for humorous austerity doesn't prepare us for the facts: he led his congregation in prayers in the morning and in the afternoon went among the people of Geneva and played skittles.

- Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (p. 75)

Contemplation is intensely active – it is alertness, but it is an alert readiness to receive, rather than get. Life is a gift that can only be received – open, not grasping, hands. I am not running things. I am participating, following. God – Father/Son/Holy Spirit – is giving, saving, healing, helping. I am truly myself when I am entering in, receiving, thanking, praising. The Christian life is a faith life – receiving not owning, entering the mystery, not solving the problems.

- Eugene Peterson, unpublished journal entry. Courtesy of Winn Collier, author of the forthcoming biography of Peterson.

Leisure is a form of silence, of that silence which is the prerequisite of the apprehension of reality: only the silent hear and those who do not remain silent do not hear. Silence, as it is used in this context, does not mean 'dumbness' or 'noiselessness'; it means more nearly that the soul's power to 'answer' to the reality of the world is left undisturbed. For leisure is a receptive attitude of mind, a contemplative attitude, and it is not only the occasion but also the capacity for steeping oneself in the whole of creation.

- *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, Josef Piepe

Sermon Outline

Play: A Foretaste of Joy
Psalm 92

Offering Your Ordinary Life to God
Stephen Baldwin

How does Psalm 92 teach us about this close relationship of playing and praying? Why should we consider the idea of playing prayerfully, and praying playfully as God's redeemed image bearers?

Because of God's great works of grace and rescue: saving us from sin and death, we can play.

How do we play as followers of Christ? We play prayerfully...and we pray playfully.

Because of God's great works of saving grace...

Christ's followers should play and pray like a musician... (Psalm 92:1-9)

Christ's followers should play and pray like the creatures... (Psalm 92:10-11)

Christ's followers will flourish as they play and pray like a forest... (Psalm 92:12-15)

Reflection Questions

- When are you most playful in your life? When is your prayer most life-giving and free?
- Think about the way an accomplished musician plays; what qualities describe the way they use their gifts?
- How would one play prayerfully? Does that mean shutting your eyes and bowing your head before playing a game or running? If not, then what does it look like?
- Given the amount of space in the Psalms for prayers of lament, intercession, supplication, cries of despair, as well as shouts of praise and thanksgiving, adoration and remembrance, do you think the psalmist is more interested in grounding our playing in prayer, or in getting us to only pray playfully?
- What would it look like to pray playfully?
- Do you believe that being contemplative means to be passive and devoid of playfulness, or fully engaged and aware of God in every moment?
- What attributes of God or teaching of scripture about God as our Heavenly Father, as the Creator of the cavorting, dancing creatures, suggest that it is appropriate to ever consider praying playfully? What does playful mean to you in that connection, thinking of God as the Creator and as our Father?
- What happens to play when it becomes an end in itself?
- What happens to prayer when it is seen as a way to get God to do what I want?