



Family Values

Virtue Realities

Playfulness

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Most people when asked to compile a list of virtues would probably not mention playfulness. Some might even contest whether or not it is a virtue. Yet if we define virtue as a desirable quality and a valuable characteristic, then playfulness should probably be in the top ten on the list. People who are playful are fun to be around. They are curious, creative and easy going. They accentuate the positive, find humor in the most mundane situations and treat the more formal and serious events with some irreverence. They enjoy life, are spontaneous and infectious.

More than likely Jesus had a very appealing, playful side to him. This factor would explain why children were attracted to him. Kids know the importance of play. They also gravitate toward adults who know how to play and do not let formality prevent them from having fun. The disciples, on the other hand, took a much more serious approach. They wanted to keep the children from bothering Jesus. They did not understand that this is what the Kingdom of God is all about. Jesus admonishes his disciples when he says: *Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.* (Luke 18:16). He then adds that unless we receive the kingdom of God as a little child, we will never enter it (v. 17). Children are accepting, trusting and innocent. They appreciate the joy of life. They jump in without reservations. This playful attitude is a prerequisite for entry into the kingdom of God.

Although we reserve playfulness for children, we tend to equate seriousness with adulthood. This perspective is reinforced by the separation of work from play. As I grew older, the message I received was that you are allowed to play only after your work is done. The Protestant work ethic sees work as a commandment and moral obligation, something that is necessary but not fun. As a result, playfulness is something you leave behind as you grow up and definitely not something that you take with you when you go to work.

There is a downside to this dichotomy. When people become too serious at work, they create more stress for themselves and promote an atmosphere of tension and anxiety. Interestingly enough, there are an increasing number of consultants whose major focus is to introduce playfulness into the workplace. One such guru of fun is Leslie Yerkes who is the author of *Fun Works: Creating Places Where People Love to Work*, and *301 Ways to Have Fun at Work*. Her discovery, along with many other experts in this field, is that when people have fun at work they are more productive, creative and invested in what they do. They enjoy coming to work. People enjoy being around one another. Other people enjoy doing business with them. Playfulness pays off. A playful approach heals. Rigidity and seriousness leads to disease or more exactly dis-ease.

According to C.K. Chesterton: *“The true object of human life is play. Earth is a test garden; heaven is a playground.”* If that is the case, then “Let the play begin!”

The following are ways to practice playfulness:

1. **Lighten up.** Make a conscious effort to look at the lighter side and find humor in situations. Be a source of joy to others.
2. **Let the children lead.** Watch children at play. Follow their example. Challenge your inhibitions.
3. **Get in touch with your playful self.** Look at pictures of yourself as a child. Think back on how you used to play and have fun. Picture letting that child out now.
4. **Have fun at work.** Remember you choose your attitude. A playful approach to work is one way of taking care of yourself, while still getting the job done.
5. **Hang out with fun people.** Surround yourself with people who are spirited, light-hearted and playful.
6. **Pray for playfulness.** Ask the “Lord of the Dance” to guide you.

Affirmation: Today I will play!

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