

Season OF PLAY





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INTRODUCTION

Description

For true life, play is not a reward after the “real work.” It’s part of God’s design.

Over one month, we invite your church to try tiny, doable moments of play in worship and at home—simple, screen-light, all-ages friendly. Expect laughter, low stakes, and high grace. Expect God to meet us in delight.

Toolkit Includes:

- 4 Sermon starters for a 4-week series on play
- Ideas for in-worship options to help your church experience play
- Simple liturgy ideas
- 5 non-sermon ideas for Playful Worship Services
- 6 church-wide play experiences

Why play?

Play isn't just a break from faith; it's a reflection of how joyful God is! Think about it: from God's wild imagination in Creation, to Jesus' first miracle at a party, the Bible shows us a God who just *loves* to have a good time. When the Church gets playful, we're mirroring God's creativity, chilling out in grace instead of freaking out, and showing the world that joy is way stronger than fear. A playful church becomes this living invitation: come on over, join the celebration of God's delight! Plus... it's just plain fun!

How to use this toolkit:

ALL WORK & NO PLAY MAKES CHURCHES DULL

We see how much you all put into serving, from food drives to community projects, and all the ways you make our neighborhoods better. But, as you look through this toolkit, let's try to gently steer away from our usual go-to of labor and instead just focus on giving and getting joy with your church family.

PLAY VS. REST

This toolkit isn't just about getting your congregation to slow down and chill out. While rest and Sabbath are totally linked to play, play also stands on its own. Diving into a season of play is a chance to feel real joy and delight and get up and play! If you find what you'd like to focus on is a Season of Rest, please see our companion sermon series, "Season of Rest" at <https://breakthroughseries.org/series/season-of-rest>.

SERMON STARTERS

These four starters aren't meant to be full sermons. Think of them as a framework and set of handles you can build on. Each one gives you a big idea, key scriptures, and some exciting ways to help your people experience play, not just hear about it.

NON-SERMON SUNDAYS

We recommend throwing in at least one "non-sermon Sunday" from this toolkit. If you only talk about play during a sermon, your church will totally miss out on experiencing joy together. So, aim for at least one Sunday where you're "doing, not just hearing."

CHURCH-WIDE PLAY EXPERIENCES

A lot of churches tend to focus on work and leadership. But what if we thought about a "Season of Play" as a month where our church really embraced joy and fun as a community? We'd love for you to use these ideas to create some playful experiences for your church, going beyond just Sunday services. Let's plan some events and activities where your church can just have a great time playing together in your community!

PLAY: Week 1 PLAY & THE GIFT OF GOD'S DELIGHT

BIG IDEA

Play is not simply recreation, or rest, or even Sabbath. It's God's gift to us that helps us to recognize and respond to God's delight in us. When we play, we learn to hear the song God is already singing over us, allowing hope and joy to rise in us rather than relying solely on our effort.

SCRIPTURE

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

Psalm 126:1-3 (NRSV)

The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.

Zephaniah 3:17 (NRSV)

PREACHING POINTS

Why Season of Play. For true life, play is not a reward after the "real work." It's part of God's design. Over one month, we'll try tiny, doable moments of play in worship and at home—simple, screen-light, all-ages friendly. Expect laughter, low stakes, and high grace. Expect God to meet us in delight.

God's Delight Comes First: In Zephaniah 3:17 we see God rejoicing, singing, delighting over us, not because of what we've done, but because of who we are. This flips our usual posture: instead of "we perform so God will delight," we recognise that God delights first and we respond.

Play tunes our ears to the song God is already singing. Psalm 126 speaks of laughter, songs of joy, tongues speaking in laughter and shouts. Play naturally produces laughter and "tongues of songs." So, when we engage in play, our souls recalibrate: we stop being solely task-oriented and instead become attentive to the presence of joy, restoration, and community. Receiving the gift of play tunes our ears to that song and rebuilds our capacity to hope together. Metaphor: Imagine a parent watching a toddler's first steps, and being disappointed. Perhaps the child took too long to reach the milestone, or the first steps were not far enough. Parents don't watch their child because the toddler has met some achievement threshold, but simply because the child is theirs and they delight in them. Play allows us to receive that delight.

EXAMPLES OF PLAY FOR DURING YOUR SERMON Here is a list of examples you could choose from during your sermon to illustrate what play might look like in people's everyday life:

Reclaim One Hour for Joy. Choose one hour this week for something that serves no purpose except joy—garden, draw, dance, play catch, bake, sing, play board games. The point is not productivity, but practicing joy.

Interrupt the Grind. When you catch yourself rushing, pause for 15 seconds, breathe deeply, and pray: "God, let me hear your song of joy right here."

Host Joy. After church or during the week, invite friends or family for something fun—pictionary, trivia night, cornhole, karaoke. Frame it as a spiritual experiment in shared laughter.

IN-WORSHIP ACTIVITY Each of the following is short, achievable, and keeps the tone light but purposeful. Use them in your worship service to engage the congregation playfully. Modify to fit your context and timing.

Joy Inventory (During Joys & Concerns)

Say: "Turn to a neighbor and share one small joy from this past week—a moment that made you smile, laugh, or breathe easier. No explanations, just name it." Encourage brief sharing, then close with: "God, we give thanks for these moments of delight—tune our hearts to hear your joy in them."

Children's Moment: do a team version of Doodle-to-Creature on a flipchart or whiteboard together, then invite adults to join in.

Breath Prayer. Teach the church how to engage in breath prayer using the following mantras:

- On the inhale breath: *Receive joy.*
- On the exhale breath: *Release hurry.*

Use this as the congregation's centering moment before the sermon or at the benediction. Encourage people to use it daily as a reset rhythm.

Relearn Delight. Take a walk and name five things that delight you—color, smell, sound, shape, texture. Say aloud, "God, thank you for delighting in your world."

Play With Someone Else's Rules. Join someone in their joy. Let your kid teach you a game, let a friend pick the music, try a hobby someone else loves. Receive *their* delight as a gift.

Doodle-to-Creature (after Children's Moment, if you have children in worship) Supplies: paper, pens or crayons. *Instructions to the congregation:*

- Pair up (or small groups).
- One person draws a random shape or squiggle in 10 seconds.
- The other turns it into a creature in 60 seconds.
- Hold up your joyful creation.

Reflect with the congregation: "God delights in creativity, not perfection. When we play, we join God's laughter."

Today's Take Home: Play Bingo

Distribute enclosed "Play Bingo" cards from the toolkit. Explain: "This isn't homework, this is an invitation to notice joy. When you complete a square, text someone that you've noticed God's delight." Encourage participants to bring their cards back near the end of the series to share stories or offer a prize to anyone who gets Bingo - like a \$5 gift certificate to the local ice cream shop or movie theater.

Optional Opening Liturgy

Leader: *Come with your lists and your laughter, your worries and your wonder—God delights to meet you here. “The Lord has done great things for us. God rejoices over you.”*

People: *“And we rejoice!”*

SERMON STARTERS

PLAY: Week 2 OUT OF SURVIVAL MODE

BIG IDEA

Play heals and moves us out of survival mode. God uses delight to unstick weary people and reopen imagination. When we play, our brains and our spirits move out of survival mode and into creativity, openness, and trust. It's not escape from what ails us; it's medicine.

SCRIPTURE

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?”

Matthew 6:25–27 (NRSV)

“People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Mark 10:13–16 (NRSV)

PREACHING POINTS

Play Loosens Worry So Grace Can Get In. Jesus' words in Matthew 6 invite us out of anxiety's grip. He doesn't shame us for worrying—he redirects our attention to God's care, embodied in creation itself. Birds, flowers, children—all live out of delight, not dread. Play interrupts the cycle of worry long enough for grace to slip through the cracks. Metaphor: Play is like loosening a jar lid stuck tight with fear. Laughter, curiosity, and

Play Is Practice with Low Stakes, Safe Risk, and Room for Surprise. Children enter the kingdom not because they're innocent but because they play—they experiment, risk, and trust the outcome to someone else. In a world obsessed with outcomes, play trains our hearts in low-stakes courage. Quote: “Play is not frivolous... it's a brain-building must-do.”
— Johnson & Dinger

imagination are the gentle torque that frees us to breathe again.

Play Heals by Expanding Our Focus. The “shower principle” is real. When we stop staring directly at the problem, new insight emerges. In play, the brain moves from survival (fight/flight/freeze) to curiosity and openness. Spiritually, that’s repentance in motion: turning from fixation on scarcity toward faith in abundance.

EXAMPLES OF PLAY FOR DURING YOUR SERMON Use these as tactile moments to unstick the congregation from anxious thinking.

Ground Yourself in God’s Care. Take 5 minutes outside. Watch the birds or clouds and repeat Matthew 6:26 aloud: “Are you not of more value than they?”

Practice Low-Stakes Risk. Do one thing this week that feels silly or unnecessary. Try a new recipe, tell a joke, learn a dance move. Let it remind you that grace meets you in imperfection.

Name Your “Game Plan” for Play. At the end of worship or day, ask: “How will I play this week? How will I celebrate play for others this week?”

IN-WORSHIP ACTIVITY

Worry Paper Airplanes (Mid-Service or Prayer Time)

Supplies: half-sheets of paper, pens. Instructions: Invite everyone to write a single worry, frustration, or stuck thought on the paper. Fold it into a paper airplane. When prompted, fly your worry toward the altar as the congregation says together: “God, hold what I can’t.” Soft instrumental or playful music can accompany and close with pastoral prayer.

Take-Home Practice. Print or project this simple invitation: “Replace one doom-scroll with five minutes of play this week: build, draw, stretch, sing, toss a ball, or dance. Notice how your mind and heart change.” Encourage participants to post or share stories next Sunday: Where did play unstick you this week?

Benediction: The Game Plan Blessing

Leader: “Look at the birds of the air.”

People: “They neither sow nor reap, yet God feeds them.”

Leader: “You are worth so much more.”

Trade One Worry Scroll for Wonder. Replace one doom-scroll session with 5 minutes of playful something: doodle, stretch, build, sing, toss a ball. Let that moment reopen your imagination.

Notice the Children. Spend time watching kids play, or remember how you used to. Ask: What does their freedom teach me about receiving the kingdom?

Children’s Moment: Worry Airplanes or ‘I-Spy God’s Goodness’ Option A – Worry Airplanes (for younger groups): Kids fold their own planes, share one worry they’re giving to God, then “launch” it together. Option B – I-Spy God’s Goodness: Invite kids to point out where they see good things—colors, smiles, light, sounds. Connect it to noticing God’s care in everyday life.

Breath Prayer

On the inhale: *Receive peace.*

On the exhale: *Release worry.*

Use before the sermon or at the close of prayer time as a collective act of trust.

People: "We will play in God's care."

Close with gentle laughter or soft humming or something that signals ease and release.

SERMON STARTERS

PLAY: Week 3 MASTERCLASS FOR A STUCK CHURCH

BIG IDEA

Play turns stuckness into movement and imagination. Play is the lab where the Spirit teaches us new moves. Playing together as a Church trains us to live with wonder and curiosity in the face of mystery. In uncertain times, we don't tighten control but we stay open instead. Play strengthens our shared capacity to follow God's surprising movements together. When the community plays, we remember that faith is not certainty but it's the joyful courage to move together into what God is doing next.

SCRIPTURE

The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim, and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days."

(Exodus 16:1-5, NRSV)

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces,

twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.
(Matthew 14:13–21, NRSV)

PREACHING POINTS

Play Trains Us to Live with Wonder. In the wilderness and on the hillside, God surprises the people with provision they couldn't predict—bread that appears with the morning dew, loaves that multiply in the hands of Jesus. Both stories invite curiosity: What might God do next? Play is the posture that keeps us open to that question. It teaches us to be amazed again, to watch for small signs of God's abundance rather than clinging to what we can explain. Metaphor: A slinky only works when it moves. Curiosity keeps the church moving in rhythm with God's unfolding grace.

Play Builds a Curious, Following Community. Both manna and loaves remind us that God's provision arrives in motion. The people have to go out each day and gather. The disciples have to take what seems too small and start passing it out. Play forms the kind of people who can follow without fear who can step into the unknown together with delight.

Play Is a Shared Practice of Discovery. When we play together, we create a space where everyone participates in trying, noticing, and learning. It's not competition; it's exploration. Play makes the community a laboratory of holy imagination—where the Spirit teaches us new moves. Through laughter, creativity, and small experiments, we build trust in each other and in God's unpredictable goodness.

What Stuck Looks Like (name it gently)

Meetings without momentum, fear of failure, perfection before progress.

How play helps:

1. Shift the frame: God is already doing a new thing; our job is to notice and join.
2. Try tiny: playful experiments lower the stakes and raise curiosity.
3. Learn fast: try, learn, try again—like a yo-yo's rhythm, movement teaches.
4. Share joy: delight fuels perseverance and makes room for neighbors.

EXAMPLES OF PLAY FOR DURING YOUR SERMON Here is a list of examples you could choose from during your sermon to illustrate what play might look like in people's everyday life:

Practice Curiosity in Conversation. Ask someone in your church or neighborhood: What are you wondering about these days? Listen with no agenda, just curiosity.

Notice God's Daily Surprises. At the end of each day, name one thing that surprised you. Perhaps it's a moment of grace, laughter, or beauty you didn't plan for.

Try a Tiny Experiment in Joy. Create one small, low-stakes way to connect. leave sidewalk chalk blessings, set out a community puzzle, or begin meetings with one surprising question.

Ask "What Might God Do Next?"

When faced with challenge or uncertainty, resist the instinct to solve. Instead, ask together, "What might God be doing here?" Let wonder lead.

IN-WORSHIP ACTIVITY

Each of these helps the congregation embody curiosity, movement, and shared discovery.

Movement Moment: The Slinky Exercise

Supplies: Slinky or yo-yo.

Hold it up and say: "This only works when it moves. Play reminds us that faith moves too. It's meant to stretch and return, to stay flexible in the Spirit."

Invite everyone to stand and join a simple rhythm: two claps and one step forward together.

Pause and say: "As we move together, may we feel the Spirit's rhythm of grace, stretching, releasing, and drawing us forward."

Optional: Have the kids lead the rhythm or repeat it at the close of worship.

Take-Home Practice: Tiny Try Card

Distribute cards that say: "This week, test one small, playful idea for connection or creativity in your world. Bring back one sentence next Sunday: What did we discover?"

Examples printed at the bottom:

- Create a chalk blessing on the sidewalk in front of your home
- Bring a treat from the local bakery to someone who serves your community
- Do a two-question icebreaker before a meeting

Children's Moment: Moving Together

Have kids show how a slinky or yo-yo "only works when it moves." Ask:

"What happens when we stop moving?" (It stops.)

"What happens when we move again?" (It goes!)

Say: "God loves when we stay curious and keep moving together. When we play, we discover what God can do!"

Invite kids to lead the congregation in the simple motion (two claps and a step) before returning to their seats.

Breath Prayer

- On the inhale: *Spirit of wonder.*
- On the exhale: *Keep us curious.*

Use before the sermon or as a closing centering prayer.

Benediction: The Curiosity Blessing

Leader: "God gives bread for today."

People: "Enough for this moment."

Leader: "God multiplies what we bring."

People: "We will move together in wonder."

Leader: "Go as a curious community—open to surprise, ready to follow."

End with one unified clap and step forward as the final "Amen."

SERMON STARTERS

PLAY: Week 4 JOY IN THE WILD

BIG IDEA

Joy is good news that people can see. When a community plays well—laughing, creating, and celebrating together—it shows the delight of God in ways that words cannot. The gift of play becomes public when our joy turns into visible good news. Every feast, festival, and shared laugh is a small rehearsal for the great party of God's Kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven. Playful people show the world that grace is not only spoken but celebrated.

SCRIPTURE

Thus says the LORD of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.
(Zechariah 8:4–5, NRSV)

Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.
(Acts 2:46–47, NRSV)

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.
(John 2:1–11, NRSV)

PREACHING POINTS

Play Reveals God's Character to the World.

Zechariah's vision describes a neighborhood that looks like a block party. Generations gather, stories are shared, and laughter fills the air. God's dream for the city is not only peace but also delight that can be heard in the streets. When we play, we join that dream. Our joy becomes a living invitation that says, "Come and see what God is like." Metaphor: A playground, a picnic table, or a neighborhood potluck becomes a picture of God's Kingdom. Joy is how God's people make the invisible visible.

Joyful Community Becomes Visible Good News.

When joy moves from private emotion to shared expression, it becomes a public sign of hope. A congregation that knows how to laugh, play, and celebrate together embodies a story the world longs to hear. In a culture marked by exhaustion and scarcity, the Church's laughter is a form of protest. It declares that God's abundance is real and available now. Metaphor: A table surrounded by laughter preaches a better sermon than any single voice could.

EXAMPLES OF PLAY DURING YOUR SERMON Here is a list of examples you could choose from during your sermon to illustrate what play might look like in people's everyday life:

Throw a Party. Plan or promote one simple, low-barrier Play Day event such as a chalk blessing, puzzle-and-pie social, park game night, mini golf outing, or karaoke night. Keep it easy, open, and fun.

Share Your Why. Encourage everyone to prepare a one-sentence testimony: "Why play matters to my faith is..." Invite people to share that sentence at the event or with someone they know.

Celebrate as a Spiritual Practice.

Play and Party Are Kingdom Practices. The story of the early church shows a people who did not hide their joy. They ate together, prayed together, and celebrated with "glad and generous hearts." Their gatherings were not secret meetings. They were open tables where everyone could see that God was doing something new. The joy of the community became its witness. At the wedding in Cana, Jesus turned water into wine and revealed the character of God through a party. The first miracle in John's Gospel happens at a celebration, not a sermon. The Kingdom of God begins with laughter, dancing, and overflowing cups. Every faithful party on earth points to the heavenly feast that Jesus promises in the end. Metaphor: When the church throws a good party, the world catches a glimpse of what resurrection feels like.

Be an Invitation. Ask each person to invite one neighbor, coworker, or friend. Let them know it is a celebration of gratitude and joy, not a program to attend.

Notice God's Party Already Happening. Throughout the week, look for places where laughter, generosity, or beauty appear. Acknowledge those as glimpses of God's Kingdom already unfolding.

End meetings or meals this week with gratitude and laughter. Remember that rejoicing is part of Christian formation, not an optional extra.

IN-WORSHIP ACTIVITY Each of these helps the congregation embody visible joy and connect it to their witness in the world.

Celebration Moment. During worship, highlight the congregation's recent experiments with playing together. Show photos, tell short stories, or invite brief testimonies of joy. Encourage applause and laughter. Close that moment with the reminder: "This is what the Kingdom looks like when joy becomes visible."

Take-Home Practice. Encourage everyone to invite one neighbor, coworker, or friend to the upcoming Play Day. Ask them to share their one-sentence testimony: "Why play matters to my faith is..." Provide cards printed with this prompt as a reminder.

Benediction: The Kingdom Party Blessing

Leader: "The streets shall be filled with laughter."

People: "And God will dwell among us."

Leader: "Go with glad and generous hearts."

People: "That our joy may be good news to the world."

Leader: "Go and live like guests at God's ongoing feast."

Invite the congregation to smile, clap, or laugh together as the final "Amen."

Children's Moment: Chalk-on-Card Prayers

Supplies: chalk, cardstock, tape.

Invite the children to draw blessing words or symbols such as "joy," "hope," or "peace."

Pray together, then send the children (with an adult) to tape their blessings to a church door or a community board.

Say: "These colorful words are our invitations to the neighborhood. They say, 'God's joy lives here.'"

Breath Prayer

- On the inhale: *God of celebration.*
- On the exhale: *Shine through our joy.*

Use this before the benediction or as part of a sending prayer.

PRACTICING PLAY TOGETHER

The joy of play is not meant to stay inside Sunday worship. These activities help your congregation live out the “Season of Play” together in everyday life. Each option can stand alone or be combined as part of a month-long churchwide emphasis. Each of these activities teaches the congregation that play is not an interruption of ministry but a way of embodying the Kingdom of God. Joy becomes public. Community becomes visible. The Church becomes a living invitation to the great party God is already hosting in the world.

Play BINGO Challenge Utilize the “Play BINGO” card enclosed with simple, fun prompts that invite people to try something new or rediscover joy. Encourage individuals, families, and small groups to fill their cards throughout the month. Offer a small prize or public celebration for anyone who completes a BINGO or the whole card. Use Sunday mornings to highlight fun stories and discoveries that came from the challenge.

Community Play Day Plan one simple, accessible gathering where your church practices joy in public. Choose what fits your context and personality.

Examples:

- *Play mini golf together.*
- *Attend a local karaoke night as a group.*
- *Host a “Minute-to-Win-It” event during or after church.*
- *Have an ice cream or dessert night at a local shop.*
- *Attend a local sporting event together.*

Whenever possible, participate with your community rather than planning something for it. Join what is already happening nearby. The goal is not to host an event but to show up together as joyful, curious neighbors.

The “Season of Play” Story Wall Transform a church hallway or lobby bulletin board into a month-long storytelling wall. Title it “A Season of Play” and provide colorful sticky notes, pens, and markers. Invite people each week to post something joyful or playful they experienced. Encourage kids and adults to participate equally. Include prompts like:

- *“Where did you experience joy this week?”*
- *“What made you laugh unexpectedly?”*
- *“Who did you play with?”*
- *“Where did you see God’s delight?”*

By the end of the season, the board becomes a visual testimony of joy that others can read and celebrate together.

Nostalgic Snack Coffee Hour

Host a special fellowship time where everyone brings a favorite snack from their childhood. Invite each person to label it with their name and the approximate year of life it represents (for example, “Tina – 1998 – Dunkaroos”). As people taste one another’s nostalgic treats, invite storytelling:

- *“What memory does this snack bring back?”*
- *“How were you playing with when you loved this?”*

This simple gathering sparks laughter, connection, and intergenerational conversation around joy through the years.

Play in the Neighborhood Week

Choose one week to be intentional about “joy sightings” beyond the church building. Encourage everyone to be attentive to where play already happens in your community and to join in naturally.

Examples:

- Visit a local park or playground and simply play.
- Join a community art class, trivia night, or pickup game.

- Bring chalk and draw blessings on sidewalks near schools or local shops.
- Hand out popsicles during a hot afternoon at the park.
- Attend a community festival together wearing matching “Play is Good News” shirts.

End the week with time for reflection:

- “Where did we see God’s joy alive in our community?”
- “Who did we meet through play?”

PLAYFUL WORSHIP SERVICES

These services reshape the flow of Sunday worship around communal play instead of a traditional sermon. Each one is self-contained, flexible in length, and grounded in joy as a form of witness.

SOUL SONG SUNDAY

Focus: Sharing the soundtrack of our souls.

Concept: Instead of a sermon, invite 3–5 people to share a song that is meaningful to them right now and explain why in one to four minutes. Each person’s story becomes a testimony of God’s presence in daily life.

Instructions for Participants:

- Choose a PG-appropriate song.
- Provide the title, performer, and choose a 2–4 minute section of music if the whole song is too long.
- Share for 1-3 minutes about how this song is speaking to your soul in this season.

Notes for Worship Team:

- Prepare to play clips or verses of each song (do not stream this portion due to copyright).
- Between songs, invite a short prayer or reflective response such as “Thanks be to God for the songs that sing to our souls.”

Why it Works: Music becomes testimony. Hearing multiple “soul songs” expands empathy and invites everyone to see God at work in unexpected rhythms.

PLAYFUL WORSHIP SERVICES

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SILLY SUNDAY (HOLY HUMOR SUNDAY)

Focus: Laughter as resurrection joy.

Concept: Revive the ancient “Holy Humor Sunday” tradition where joy itself becomes worship. Churches in 15th-century Bavaria celebrated Easter’s lasting joy with jokes, stories, and playful chaos as a symbol of Christ’s victory over death.

Worship Introduction “Today we are hosting our first Silly Sunday. For centuries, Christians have

Example: used laughter as a way to celebrate the biggest surprise in history—the resurrection of Christ. So today, may our mouths be filled with laughter and our tongues with songs of joy.”

Ideas to Include:

1. Polaroid cameras circulating for candid, silly photos.
2. Ten Easter eggs hidden around the sanctuary, each with a joke inside. When a volunteer blows a kazoo, someone finds an egg and reads their joke aloud.

3. Instead of a sermon, read a humorous or meaningful children's book such as *The Very Impatient Caterpillar* by Ross Burach.

Suggested Scripture: Psalm 126:2–3

Why it Works: Holy Humor Sunday reminds the church that laughter is sacred. Joyful noise and shared humor become acts of worship.

PLAYFUL WORSHIP SERVICES

STORY SWAP SUNDAY

Focus: God's delight through story.

Concept: Replace the sermon with short, live storytelling. Invite several people to share a 3–5 minute story about a moment that made them laugh, dream, or rediscover joy.

How it works:

- Choose 3–4 storytellers ahead of time.
- Encourage stories about childhood play, surprises, or moments when God met them through joy.
- Between stories, sing a brief refrain such as "Rejoice in the Lord always."

Variation: Use prompts like "When I last felt delight," "My most joyful mistake," or "A time play changed me."

Why it Works: Storytelling connects people across generations. Each story becomes a parable of grace and an invitation for others to see their own joy as sacred.

PLAYFUL WORSHIP SERVICES

ART & IMAGINATION SUNDAY

Focus: Creativity as worship.

Concept: Instead of listening to a sermon, the congregation creates something together that expresses God's delight—through art, color, or movement.

Possible Format:

- Community Art Wall: Provide long paper rolls, markers, and crayons. Invite everyone to draw or write words that describe what joy looks like.
- Clay or Play-Dough Prayers: Hand out small pieces of clay and encourage everyone to shape something that represents gratitude or hope.
- Prayer Flags of Joy: Use fabric squares or paper to create a banner of prayers and colors that can hang in the sanctuary for the month.

Suggested Scripture: Genesis 1:27 or Ephesians 2:10 ("For we are God's handiwork").

Why it Works: Creativity is a form of prayer. This service embodies play as holy work and invites the whole body to worship through imagination.

PLAYFUL WORSHIP SERVICES

NEIGHBORHOOD JOY SUNDAY

Focus: Worship as public play.

Concept: Take worship outside the walls. Begin with prayer, a short reading, and a song of joy. Then scatter into your neighborhood in small groups to engage in playful acts of kindness or joy.

Possible Activities:

- Sidewalk chalk blessings with short prayers or words of encouragement.
- Free lemonade or popsicle stand.
- Leave encouraging notes on community boards or benches.
- Host a mini “pop-up party” in a nearby park.

Gather Back After 30–45 minutes, return to the sanctuary to share quick stories of where

Together: joy showed up. Suggested Scripture: Luke 14:15–23 (parable of the great banquet).

Why it Works: This service practices “mission as play.” It turns faith into visible joy for the community and reminds the congregation that God’s Kingdom is already breaking out in the streets.

PLAYFUL WORSHIP SERVICES

FESTIVAL OF GRATITUDE

Focus: A celebration of joy through testimony and thanksgiving.

Concept: Instead of a sermon, create space for people to give thanks aloud. Gratitude is one of the simplest and most joyful forms of play because it opens the heart to wonder.

How It Works:

- Set up microphones or handheld mics.
- Invite people to share one short sentence of gratitude: “I thank God for...”
- Between every few testimonies, sing a chorus of a familiar hymn like “To God Be the Glory” or “Give Thanks.”
- Encourage all ages to share, from the smallest children to the oldest members.

Variation: End with a shared “thanksgiving toast” using sparkling cider or lemonade cups raised together. Use this as the Lord’s Supper.

Suggested Scripture: Philippians 4:4–5 or Psalm 100.

Why it Works: Gratitude draws attention to the goodness of God right now. The whole service becomes a joyful offering of praise.

SEASON OF PLAY LITURGIES

Invocation or Opening Prayer: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.” - Genesis 1:1-3 (NRSV)

Creation is God’s playful, purposeful artistry.

Before I had form, when my face was hidden in darkness, when I was mired in shame
God was creating...

The Spirit of God blew and kissed my tear-stained cheeks.

The Voice of God did not boom across the expanses of time and space (as one might assume)
but whispered, let there be light -- in your hands and your feet
in your eyes and your mind.

Let there be light in your spirit and your smile.

And the light of Christ shined deep in my heart.

There was light...And it was good.
- by Pastor Rebekah Solar

Call to Worship: Come with your lists and your laughter, your worries and your wonder—
God delights to meet you here.

Sending Prayer: One: The Laughing One called us together
All: so we could share in the laughter of life.
One: The Laughing One sends us out,
All: to carry the joy of life and love to the world.
One: Go out to laugh, to live, to love.
All: AMEN!
- by Rev Gord, Worship Offerings

End of Worship How will you play this week? or What's your game plan for play this week?

Intention: How will you celebrate play for others this week?

Music: Consider incorporating campfire songs and children's songs into worship during Season of Play like...

- This Little Light of Mine
- You Are My Sunshine (secular-but-sweet; works for a “delight” theme)
- He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands → can adapt to “God’s got the whole world...”
- Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelujah / Praise Ye the Lord (great stand/sit game)
- Father Abraham → can adapt to “People of God had many kids...” if you want less gendered language
- Rise and Shine and Give God the Glory

B	I	N	G	O
Tell a joke to someone	Shake Your Sillies Out	Try a new game or hobby	Make Ur Own	Lead an Ice Breaker at work

Play with someone at least five years older or younger than you	Try a little friendly competition (cornhole, darts, trivia, cards, video game)	Make Ur Own	Dance to a song from your high school era	Play with a pet or animal
Build or bake something with your own two hands	Go to a concert, play, or musical	Free Space	Invite someone outside your usual circle to join you for something playful	Make Ur Own
Try an ice cream flavor you've never had before	Make Ur Own	Go look up at the stars and dream about space	Watch a movie from your childhood	Have a "play date" with a friend
Make Ur Own	Do a project-for-fun at home (not a honey-do)	Bring a nostalgic snack to share to work or school	Swing on a Swing	Watch a comedian who makes you belly-laugh



Season OF PLAY
