

Ep 82 The Importance of Play

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

play, rest, fun, rejuvenating, vacation, ritual

Dominic Kaiser 00:06

Welcome to The Contemplative Life. Three pastors, friends and spiritual companions help us explore spirituality through a contemplative lens.

Christina Roberts 00:13

I'm Christina Roberts.

Chris Roberts 00:16

I'm Chris Roberts.

Kristina Kaiser 00:18

I'm Kristina Kaiser. We're glad you joined us.

Christina Roberts 00:23

Hello, it's great to be with you. Today we are talking about the importance of play. And I think it's important to note that oftentimes in our imagination around contemplative practices, we might tend to think about silence, quiet, stillness, which certainly is an anchor part of the contemplative practices. However, I think it was Kristina Kaiser several episodes ago that named that there's so many different ways to engage in the contemplative, including movement, and art and all these different pathways. And so I thought it would be fun today to talk about the importance of play and the role that that has in contemplative living. I would say that the importance of rest and rejuvenation is gaining more attention. But I've noticed that sometimes when someone recognizes, okay, I do need to rest in my life, I do need to engage in these ways outside of work, there's like a blank stare of, I don't even know what to do. I'm so out of touch with play and enjoyment and what I would do for pleasure, that it almost becomes like a stress factor of then having to figure that out. So I thought today, we could talk about play, and the contemplative and what comes up for us.

Kristina Kaiser 01:36

I'm very thankful that we're getting to have this conversation, because when I was a kid, the notion of rest was very important in our family, but rest really was like, you turn everything off, and you're quiet, and you take a nap, which was not my favorite experience as a young person. You just waited for the grown ups to wake up really. So

it is in my grown up life that I've been able to begin to cultivate, what does rest look like? And what are the many possible ways to rest? What is the good that comes from this? I was reading a book, recently called *Wild Mercy* by Mirabai Starr. She has a whole chapter on rest. And there's this little reading that she goes through about laying in my lap. And it goes on to talk about how as you are resting, things will sort themselves out. Some of this burden will lift off and solutions will appear and it's like going down a lazy river. The way that it's written is so beautiful. So I'm very thankful we're talking about this today.

Chris Roberts 02:52

Yeah, I mean, I wouldn't necessarily associate play with contemplative whenever first looking at it. But as you guys talk about play, the importance of it. In fact, whenever I was doing my spiritual direction training, they listed four of the main reasons why people come to spiritual direction and to be contemplative, to do the inner work, look at the inner landscape. And I only remember three of those reasons. I have notes somewhere so I can find the fourth reason, but one is because they're in a wilderness experience, and they're needing someone to help them identify God in the places of wilderness. The second one is opening up your schedule, to find play, to be able to have recreation, whether it's paying more attention to your hobbies, painting, or even doing something out in the garage. What does it look like to identify? What are the passions that are outside of your vocation that you need to pursue? And they call it play, finding room in your schedule for play. And then wisdom seeking is another reason. But yeah, I find that I would not associate play with contemplative, I would associate rest with contemplative, but what I hear you guys painting is a picture of how the rhythms that rest and play are rhythms that are super important to our life. So that's one thing I find interesting as we talk about play in the contemplative.

Christina Roberts 04:43

It's interesting, Chris, that you note and use the word recreation because I think that there is something that when we play there is a re-creating that goes on inside of us. And I think sometimes again, we don't associate that and so it's helpful to have examples. And oftentimes when I'm doing rest and renewal retreats, I have a handout that comes actually from Dr. Stuart Brown. And he identifies eight different types of play. I'm sure I got this from a parenting book somewhere, but it's completely relevant for any age. And I like this because it expands. I think we can think of playing in maybe one or two ways, maybe doing sports or something like that. But collecting things, for example, was one of the types of plays that he named, and people that like to collect stamps or rocks, or maybe it's vinyl records or things like that. And it's like, Oh, that's really interesting that that was something that he named. And so I think, oftentimes expanding our idea of play, and there's something rejuvenating in that. And so I think part of the

reason why rest is included in contemplative practices is because we need mental breaks, we need physical breaks, we need opportunities where our soul can kind of lay low in the normal day to day stuff, and have that recreating, that rejuvenation type of aspect. And so I think getting in touch with, yeah, these are the things that I really like. I was recently sitting with someone who was going on a vacation. And I think there was this pressure of 've been working really hard. And so I've got to make this vacation really good, because we haven't been able to travel. Through talking, we recognized that this person really loves ice cream, it's a favorite thing and even had ice cream at her wedding...loves ice cream. And so at the end she decided that one of the ways that she was going to rejuvenate was to go to as many different ice cream shops that she could in these towns that she was visiting. And to determine, this is my favorite gelato place. This is my favorite flavor. And just to add, her face was lighting up recognizing that this counts as play. Again, it doesn't have to be now she must go play pickleball. She can look at different ice creams, and that could be rejuvenating for her. So again, I think it's important to expand our idea of that and the benefit that it brings.

Kristina Kaiser 06:55

Oh my gosh, I want to go to that wedding. I love ice cream. Yes, I think there are times in my life too. And I'm so glad that you mentioned something like collecting stamps, not because I collect stamps, but sometimes I make puzzles as part of my own experience of play. Because it's this delight. I love colors. And there's often surprise in puzzle making, just the way that a puzzle gets cut, you just don't imagine necessarily that that piece is going to go where it goes. I often make them intentionally. I pick something that has a sentimental meaning or it hits it. As some of you will know, I love sparkles and this kind of thing, it hits it because there's a little piece of sparkle in there or something. So it incorporates but then also the family will kind of tootle in and out. Nobody ever has the amount of stamina to stick with it for too long. But, you know, there's this connection piece that happens as we all sit together. And so it's not stamp collecting, but it's not kicking a ball either. And I only do it in these special times, because of how much I invested myself in it. So yeah, making is definitely one of mine.

Chris Roberts 08:19

Well, I don't know if going on an adventure is the type of play but for me, just setting out and not knowing where the road is going to take you with a group of friends or most recently my family. And so I find that if we can have a sense of adventure, and stumble into good things, that is very restful and playful for me. And it allows me to sharpen my awareness, right? What is it that we're going to stumble into as we're looking for good things? And I find the awareness piece is huge for our lives. What's bringing joy, what's bringing rest, things that are giving rest and things that are giving joy and satisfaction.

And so for me, I find you setting out on an adventure and having my awareness sharpened to to discover unknown treasures is important.

Christina Roberts 09:30

I think talking about connecting with others through our play is I think what you're naming to Chris, which is important. And it's important for our own well being and our own tanks being built up, but also just thinking through how that opens up richer relationships in conversation and depth. And I remember years ago when Chris and I were first married, and we had a pool table just off of our kitchen and he would have people over to play pool and a lot of times I would be in the kitchen kind of chatting with people. And he said you know Christina, it's interesting, because when your friends come over, you guys can sit at the kitchen table and just go deep quickly, you've got just a cup of coffee, and all of a sudden you're sharing deeply about your life. That's not the case with some of my guy friends. We need to shoot pool for a while. And after maybe a couple rounds of pool, we don't have to look each other in the eye, we're looking at the pool table, but through that conversation emerges. And we start to get deep, because we have the pool that is part of our engagement. And so I think that's interesting as well. I was recently listening to a podcast about parenting and the importance of playing with children. And I think sometimes there can be some guilt around the fact of I don't like to sit on the floor and play with my kids or whatever type of play that they're into. And also, and that's real, and not to shame anybody. And also, I think that there's an opportunity to try to find those spots where, okay, you like this type of play, and I like it, or I can tolerate it or whatever. And so can this be a point of connection where you feel bonded and your kids' love tank is being filled up. And then I think from that comes dynamic and good conversation because there's a sense of love. And that was fun. You know, whenever we have a fun day with a friend or a pal or whatever. We talked about brain chemicals a few episodes ago, your oxytocin is high, and you're doing really well. And I think it promotes some other types of connection as well.

Kristina Kaiser 11:20

I think the words connection and awareness have both come up. And it becomes such a big deal. We make Saturday breakfasts in our house, they're kind of this big highlight. Since it's a ritual, really everybody knows it's coming. Everybody expects it, everybody looks forward to it. But I have found, there's an intention that I have to set not teach anybody how to use a knife at Saturday breakfast, because that just changes the whole dynamic. So it really sets a tone and a purpose. And then we kind of stay inside of that ritual, or else it's not it's not special. It's not set apart. Like we can teach cutting or whatever, at any other meal. But yeah, that notion of the ritual is, I think I didn't understand ritual for many, many years. I'm starting to realize like anything that we do,

on purpose, with intention regularly, even if it's oh, I lit this candle. And as I was reading that book, *Wild Mercy* and they're symbolic, they have a meaning. When the wine comes over the cup, it has a meaning and a purpose. And that we can do the same things in our own lives. So Saturday, breakfast is also one of those stories for us.

Chris Roberts 12:46

Yes, it's interesting that you bring up rituals. I think one ritual that we've had in our life is Saturday, or whatever day off, we have outings with our bikes. We pack our bikes up, we put them on the bike rack, and we head out to some unknown destination and bike for a while. And you know, we've had different seasons of that. I was asking myself the question of why. Because we did it recently and it was great. It was good fun. And I had to, to ask myself, why didn't we do this anymore? And I think that's important, too, because you look at why your ritual isn't working. And I think our kids were at a time in their life where the complaints were so, life's stealing about getting in the van. *I don't know what it's going to be like.. don't know, any of this stuff.. I don't want to do it.* So it became increasingly more challenging to get out the door. But we tried it again recently. And, you know, I think that's great to revisit some of the rituals that have been life-giving, you may have to set them aside for a while because of a season of life or whatever. But I really look forward to maybe this new season of setting off on Bike Adventures and I'll have to evaluate it to see what the complaint level is. Or maybe it's nonexistent. Maybe it'd be right up everyone's alley. But I think that's an important point you bring up.

Christina Roberts 14:28

I appreciate what both of you are naming because I do think, Kristina, you're right, we can easily slip back into work mode, teaching mode, this is going to be a teachable moment for my kids, rather than No, we're just going to enjoy a pancake right now. It doesn't matter that I'm teaching you a kitchen skill. It doesn't have to be utilitarian. And I think to your point, Chris, as part of your family, there were the complaints in the van but then every time we did the bike ride, everybody had fun. But it was sort of this effort to get out the door or the effort to pack the picnic or to do the thing. And so I think with play, there are some costs involved or some boundaries or some effort that we have to put into it. So I think sometimes it's easier to just not do it, maybe because of those things. And yet, once we do it, once we go on the vacation, it's fun, or once we do the outing, or whatever it is that you're naming. And so I think that that's important as well that there's some effort to it. And even the reevaluation. Chris, and I recently, were just discussing this with our dates. And there was a season where breakfast dates were a highlight for us when the kids were in school. Evening dates are hard, but we would enjoy weekly breakfasts. And just recently, it's like, you know, that's not doing it for me anymore. I think I'd rather do something physical and active together, breakfast can

maybe be a part of that. But like sitting across from you right now in the summer isn't really doing it for me. And so it's like, Okay, let's try something else. Let's switch it up. And then we can maybe come back to that. So I think it's important to acknowledge, this is part of my fun, and maybe it needs to be tweaked a little bit to really be rejuvenating,

Kristina Kaiser 15:57

I really appreciate being able to name that seasonal aspect. Because right now, we really are in a time of the year where going out and there just is a different rhythm. And that's okay, it's that freedom to be able to allow it. We've talked a little bit about that rejuvenation aspect, but sometimes this rotation of things is part of what brings it alive and makes it so exciting. But similar, right? When we put up holiday decorations, we get excited about it, we get equally excited to take them down. So there is that level of moving from one season into the next and being able to be flexible in the midst of it as part of the fun. There is a person I read recently, who was talking in the context of something else like grief, something struggling. But they too are talking about going on vacations and how stressed out people tend to become around the planning aspect, how much work it takes just to get ready to go somewhere, do something fun. And they were kind of uplifting, how does one have a restful experience, overall? And they were saying, it's really this ability to be in the present moment now that we will feel most rested, when we are able to be where we are right now as opposed to always looking forward. And so that has really stuck with me, because I am definitely planning, thinking, trying to put everything in good order as this is my new ideal. To just live into this moment and see what kind of rest can come of it.

Christina Roberts 17:43

I know we're talking about friendship, relationships, family, even in the workplace. I think it's important to have ..some offices where they have the joke of the day or Friday Bagel day or lunch out or some offices that have recreational equipment in the building. Those sorts of things. And so I do think it breaks it up, it makes life zesty, interesting, joyful. Joy is one of the, hopefully, the outcomes and the fruit of the Spirit is joy. And I think cultivating different ways of play to incorporate that seems really important to our conversation as well.

Well, thanks so much for this interesting conversation around play. For those that might be interested in that handout that I use in retreats on Play, there's a couple of different ways that you can get a hold of that. So depending on how you listen, if you click on the show notes, there's a link to the show notes where you can sign up for a newsletter and we can send that to you via that vehicle. Or if you want to go to info@foundrysc.com, you can just put play in the subject line and we will send you that PDF. Hopefully that would be a great resource to kind of get your thinking going in different ways that you

can play. So thanks for generative conversation. And now we're going to transition to the part of our podcast where we talk about what we are into this week.

Christina Roberts 19:09

So friends, what are we into?

Chris Roberts 19:11

Well, I have been into love tanks and health tanks. Recently, I've had a lot of congestion or summer cold or something like that. My throat has hurt and I've been coughing a lot. And so my son says, Dad, how are you feeling? How's your tank? And you know, I would say you know, I'm at 50% And he goes, Okay, you need anything? And I'm like no, I'm good. And then he's wanting to know my health tank and then he's been giving me hugs and asking if my love tank is full. And then I'll tell him a percentage and usually it's lower than 100. So he gives me a lot of hugs to get me up to 100%. So me and my son have been playing percentages with, Energy Tank and fun and love tank. So that's what I've been into this week.

Kristina Kaiser 20:12

That sounds like the best caretaker ever. Oh my goodness. I love it. Oh, well, I think I had mentioned not too long ago that we were hoping to get an apple tree. It arrived. We got it yesterday and it is now in the ground. And now we are into learning how to water a newly planted tree because there are tricks to this. You can't just plant there and walk away, it turns out. So I've been looking at multiple websites to get the optimal watering plan for a brand new planted tree. And then apparently we'll get some apples this year. And then every year you get 40 more apples on average. So this will be the gift that keeps on giving. I can't wait.

Christina Roberts 21:00

Nice. I like all of your agricultural adventures, Kristina. They often appear on the podcast. Well, I am into Legos. And as part of this play theme, we have decided as a family to do a Lego competition. So yesterday we went to a used LEGO Store in Madison. And so we all went and the kids picked out a new figurine. And then we got four of those new kinds of plate things that you establish. So our theme is going to be vacation, anything to do with vacations. And currently the kids are sorting out the Legos and then we'll each get to pick our pile of Legos to use for our competitions. So I'm really excited about this. So I am into all of the good things that Legos have to offer.

Well, thanks so much for listening to the podcast. Until next time, make it a great week.

Dominic Kaiser 21:49

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