

Game On



July 2019 (30 June - 3 August)



It's July, summer is in full swing (hopefully...) and many of us are enjoying taking advantage of the longer days and better weather to fit in more fun, games and sports. Maybe we are dusting off the running shoes, joining pals for a kick about in the park, or picking up a new hobby in the evening after work.

Summer can be a great time for games - running about while the sun blazes or enjoying a board game as the rain trickles down the windows. The restless days are a little longer and the possibilities are endless. Our loving God loves and blesses our sense of fun and adventure. God is at the games table, hiding with us in our newly built den in the middle of a game of tig, cheering us on at the stadium and keeping pace alongside as we jog round the park.

This month, as we continue to read the Bible together, we are going to think about the skills we develop from the games we play with one another. How can we apply these insights to our wider life and faith?

- What do sports teach us about endurance?
- How is being a disciple like being a team player?
- How can rules actually increase our freedom rather than limit it?
- How can we win, draw and lose well (in games and life)?
- How can games help us discover our 'flow state'?

Our creator God delights in us and wants us to enjoy living, working and playing together. Games are a great way to celebrate the sheer joy of being alive as blessed children of God. This month let's discover how the Bible informs our play and how our play informs how we read the Bible. Right - game on!

Each week of the theme runs Sunday-Saturday and has its own subtheme, which contains daily Bible readings and thought triggers.

Striving and persevering — Games as training (30 June)

Many games and sports are tests of our physical and mental endurance. Can we keep up, can we break ahead, can we push that last inch? This week our Bible readings and prompts focus on the idea of sports and games as ways of training ourselves to persevere that bit further, to give that bit more..

In your prayers this week we invite you to particularly explore running, track and field and other games that test our physical and mental reserves as we push against our limits.

1. **2 Kings 2: 1-14**
 1. **Chariot of fire!** What powerful language that captures the irresistible momentum of Elijah being swept into heaven, leaving Elisha in the dust. This phrase inspired a line of William Blake's poem *Jerusalem* and the 1981 film *Chariots of Fire* that tells the story of Scottish Christian runner Eric Liddel.
2. **Psalm 77**
 2. **Digging a little deeper.** The psalmist, in a time of trouble, gets motivation by reaching out to God. Many of us when pushing against our limits when playing an intense sport find ourselves recalling past experiences to give us the strength to continue.
3. **1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21**
 3. **Relay** - passing on the mantel. A lot of games and sports featuring a passing on of the baton - here we recall Elijah passing on his mantle to Elisha. Is there something inherent in games and sports that trains us to let go and move on, having made our contribution?
4. **Psalm 16**
 4. **Hiding out in the den.** Long days of summer for children often means hours of games outside, exploring new places and perhaps making dens to hide in. For children dens and hiding places are often part of the adventure — and so it is with God — we can take refuge in the midst of life's adventure to hide in God's love for us before hurtling off to the next escapade on the path of life.
5. **Galatians 5:13-25**
 5. **Good sportsmanship.** Playing well together cultivates the fruit of the Spirit - games give us ways of practicing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
6. **Luke 9: 51-62**
 6. **The clock is ticking.** Games can teach us the importance of using time wisely. When you kick off the blocks you have to be fully committed and keep your head in the game, making the right priorities.
7. **Hebrews 12: 1-3**
 7. **Jesus: pioneer, perfecter, pacemaker!** Jesus helps us push that bit further. With Jesus setting the pace where might we end up?

It's ma ba - I'm going home! (7 July)

Games are fun but when we unwrap a new toy, when we form teams, work out the rules, try and settle disputes - things can go wrong fast. When tempers run high people get offended and miffed. It's easy to sulk, to give up and say "It's my ba, I'm going home."

This week our readings and prompts show us that in games and discipleship - it's important to trust and bear with one another so that all can participate well.

1. 2 Kings 5:1-14

1. **The Incredible Sulk.** In games we can be incredibly petulant when things don't go our way. Sometimes it takes wiser heads around us to counsel us (see verses 3, 13) to do the right thing. Naaman wanted healed on his terms and the answer was "Suck it up buttercup!" there's one way to do this. To play well and live well we have to listen to the advice of others.

2. Psalm 30

2. **God does not sulk.** In verse 5 the psalmist tells us that God feels anger but does not nurse resentments. Even if we sulk our God doesn't bear grudges against us.

3. Isaiah 66:10-14

3. **God as comforting mother** - able to dry our tears and get us back in the game.

4. Romans 12: 1-8

4. **Get over yourself.** Sometimes we sulk - throw our toys out the pram - because we think that people don't get that we are *right* - that we know *best*. Sometimes we need a bit of humility and perspective. As children, and as adults, we benefit from learning through games the skills of cooperation and coordination to stop ourselves becoming complacent and arrogant.

5. Galatians 6: 1-16

6. Jonah 4

5. **Bear with one another.** In games, and in life, don't lord other people's mistakes over them petulantly.

7. Luke 10: 1-20

6. **Famous biblical sulker Jonah.** Jonah's fed up, he'd had enough. He even says to God abruptly that he is "angry enough to die." It's easy in the heat of the moment, to get caught up in the intensity and lose sight of the big picture.

7. **Team work makes the dream work.** A large team of 70 is divided into teams of two and given a strategy to follow. The mission wouldn't work if they'd sulked and gone off alone, they had to learn to work together.

Learning the way - following the rules... (14 July)

People often have negative associations with 'rules' but games are comprised almost entirely of rules. They give a framework that sets expectations and enables participation. Without rules chess would simply be an ornament and cricket an exercise in jogging aimlessly around a field. You could argue that computer games follow lines of code (rules) which dictate what can and cannot happen. Without these rules there would be no game - nothing to interact with. In life, in games, in faith — rules are not an end in themselves, they serve a wider purpose, allowing us to join in. We train ourselves and learn the rules of the games we love in order to take part. Not all rules are the same, some are constant and some are subject to review, it's a continual process of thoughtful application.

1. Psalm 82
 2. Deuteronomy 30: 8-14
 3. Psalm 25: 1-10
 4. Colossians 1:1-14
 5. Luke 13: 10-17
 6. Luke 10: 25-37
 7. Matthew 7: 12
1. **Referee!** In verse 8 the psalmist is calling for the umpire to intervene. "Come on ref!" Many contests rely on an adjudicator who stands apart, observing the play to make impartial decisions. It's an incredibly difficult, and stressful position to be in - having to balance competing cries of injustice. Thanks to instant replay technology, a lot of televised sports now have a strange otherworldly quality as the video referee 'from above' interrupts play with special insight. How useful is the metaphor of a referee for God?
 2. **Rules!** Moses here is saying: get a grasp of the rules, internalise them 'in your heart' so that they become a second nature - so you can play the game well. You will struggle to win a game of chess if you have to remember how the little horse moves every turn.
 3. **God as instructor.** Verses 8 and 9 say that the Lord instructs sinners and teaches the humble. In both our humility and our transgressions God is on hand to guide us.
 4. **Encouraging words.** Paul begins his letter by expressing thankfulness and giving encouragement to the recipients. It's a good way of getting the team on side as positive reinforcement helps us learn the rules.
 5. **Engage with the rules.** Rulebooks for games try to anticipate a range of possibilities but they cannot cover every eventuality. Sometimes circumstances require us to engage thoughtfully with the rules - to carry out their spirit rather than just go through the motions.
 6. **Interpreting the rules.** You can imagine that the priest and the Levite could have quoted all kinds of rules to justify their actions. But the Samaritan follows a higher rule and goes above and beyond for the sake of the injured man. Life is usually more complicated than the games we play - throwing us unusual dilemmas. If we internalise the rules and get a good sense of the game -we don't have to be able to quote every page of a rulebook.
 7. **The Golden Rule** — followed by the Good Samaritan who went for Gold treating another as he would like to be treated. This rule is a great guiding principle for life. Note the positive formulation of this rule - *do unto others*, instead of *not do unto others what I wouldn't want done to me*. This rule is not 'live and let live' - like all good rules, like all good games, it's a call to participate, to act, to join in.

Win, lose or draw (21 July)

It's the taking part that counts... is it really? It doesn't always feel like it. Part of the fun of games is the sense of jeopardy - of putting it all down on the line - the end result of who put more beanbags through a hoop, or balls into a net, or plastic tokens into a pile, might be ultimately meaningless - but that doesn't mean they're not significant. In games, and in life, we can struggle to win, lose or draw well - but in both life and games the key is to give it a good go with grace. Our Bible readings and prompts this week look at some of the highs and lows of playing and living. How can we live and play graciously - keeping our eyes on the ultimate prize?

1. Amos 8: 1-12

1. **Sowing your own defeat.** The experience of a crushing loss - of everything going wrong and having to pay for it.

2. Psalm 52

2. **Bad winner!** When playing a game a 'bad loser' is no fun, but arguably what's worse is a 'bad winner' who crows over you smugly. The psalmist here calls out such a bad winner.

3. Proverbs 17: 22

3. **Drawing out the positives!** Sometimes we can win well and lose well but *draw* badly, struggling to cope with the frustrating ambiguity of an impasse. For spectators an inconclusive draw can be more frustrating than a valiant loss. This proverb uses expressive language to remind us to accentuate the positive. Life often throws us 'draws' where the results of a given situation are ambivalent. Seeing the bright side and 'rounding up', not giving into frustration can have a profound affect on our wellbeing.

4. Genesis 18: 1-10

4. **A life changing snack time!** For many of us one of the best bits about playing games together is the break at half time, or when you're called in for fish fingers and beans afterwards! Here we see Abraham and Sarah throwing together an impromptu snack. Sometimes taking a moment to stop and rest with others can make all the difference - it's certainly about to change things up for Abraham and Sarah.

5. Psalm 15

6. Luke 10: 38-42

5. **Player of the match.** Many team sports have a feature where a particular man or woman is singled out for their contribution. It tends to be given to someone who has played both proficiently and with integrity. The psalmist here extols the value of personal honour.

7. Colossians 1: 15-28

6. **Keep your eyes on the prize.** It's easy to get caught up with all the little things and miss the big things right in front of us. These little tasks might be important but they shouldn't distract us from the central aim.

7. **The ultimate trophy.** It's a great feeling to win, to work hard for something and achieve it. Paul here encourages us to strive towards the ultimate trophy - the firstborn of creation, the hope of glory.

The sheer joy of being alive (28 July)

Fun and games - water fights, trampolines, bouncy castles, trips to the beach, lawn bowls with the gang, darts with pals. One of the core messages of the Bible is learning to trust God and embrace life. Fun, sports and games are one of the ways we can enjoy spending time with one another, learning growing, keeping physically and mentally fit as we make friends and grow in trust of one another and God.

In times of turmoil we can quickly sacrifice a sense of fun and stop playing despite the fact that games can be a great stress reliever. Games are invaluable to society as they give us safe forms of conflict, and they have the power to break down barriers and heal wounds across borders. God uses our games as ways of blessing one another.

1. Psalm 85
 2. Psalm 118: 21-29
 3. Genesis 18: 20-32
 4. Psalm 138
 5. Colossians 2: 6-19
 6. Philippians 4: 8-9
 7. Luke 11: 5-13
1. **Righteousness and peace will kiss.** Beautiful language to express a vision of harmony — everything coming together. Sports often give us these blissful moments of disparate elements coming together to create the perfect moment — like a glorious goal sailing under the crossbar.
 2. **This is the day that the Lord has made** — one of the gifts of playing games is they can keep us entirely, wonderfully ‘in the moment’.
 3. **A dangerous game?** A remarkable conversation between God and Abraham, that perhaps suggests not **God’s** growing understanding of **humanity** — but rather **humanity’s** growing understanding of **God**. Unrighteous ways lead inevitably to disaster, but Abraham gets a growing insight into a God that knows the value of human life. In this fascinating text Abraham and the culture that the Bible emerged from is learning new ways of letting go and trusting God.
 4. **Your steadfast love endures forever.** Trusting in the Lord allows us to walk in the midst of trouble.
 5. **Don’t let anyone disqualify you!** We are rooted in God’s love.
 6. **Get in your flow state.** Athletes and performers sometimes talk about a ‘flow state’ when you are mentally in the zone and focusing on the right things. They tune out distractions and hit the sweet spot - fully committed and enjoying what they are doing - perhaps visualising what it will be like to succeed in order to realise it. Paul here is inviting us into our flow state.
 7. **Knock on the door!** Ask for a fish! Push the boat out and ask for an egg! Embrace life, run with it, go for goal!