

Game On!

Turning Labor into Love

June 7, 2025



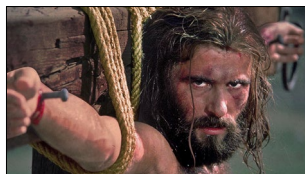
Today we're learning how to **enjoy exertion!** Cuz, if life is *designed* with *deliberate* difficulties for us to *endure*, why not *welcome* our adversity with a *warm embrace*? After all, God may have *cursed* us with *labor* – but He never said we *couldn't* learn to *like* it! So, **Do you whistle while you work?**



Or do you *stress while* you struggle? And what do you think *others* would say? *Last week*, we learned to power through our problems by *seeing* them *through* a positive *perspective* that made *frustrating failure* part of a *process* that led to *faithfully finishing*. So, in *that way*:



[We can learn to] Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith eventually produces perseverance. – James 1:2 NIV



Right?! Like we *already* learned – **our faith in the future helps us endure the problems of the present.** Cuz *faith* teaches us to *trust* in an *unseen context* that *will one day* make everything *worth it*. It's the "*delight from a distance*" that we *learn* when we gain a *new perspective* of *delayed gratification*. So why does *Peter* say it like *this*:



Rejoice inasmuch as you *participate* present tense in the sufferings of Christ, *so that you may be* even more OVERjoyed future tense when His glory is revealed. – 1 Peter 4:13 NIV



Peter makes it sound like we shouldn't just *consider* it joy but actually *experience* the emotion *during* our difficulty; is that *right Paul*?

Rejoice in the Lord always. Always? I mean, there's a time to *weep and* a time to *laugh* – but I will say it again: Rejoice! – Philippians 4:4 NIV

Because **always rejoicing doesn't mean we can't cry – but it does mean there's nothing in your life that can't be turned into joy** – since there's *nothing* in your life God can't *use for good*! So, if you'd like to *actively enjoy* your *adversity*, we need to add another "F" word to *frustration*, *failure*, *faith*, and *finishing*; fun! Because **joy is a spiritual fruit we're supposed to produce in the present!**

Well gee whiz... *embracing* struggle for a *future reward* is *one thing* – but *delighting* in difficulty while you're *drowning* just seems *delusional*, doesn't it? **How on earth can frustration and failure simultaneously be fun?** Well, just think of the last time *you* chose *frustration* and *failure* for *fun* – cuz we do it *all the time*! In fact, it's one of our *favorite* things to do to *unwind from work*. **Games!** Games are a *game-changer* cuz **the whole purpose of a game is to transform adversity into enjoyment!** Think about it, real-world *financial* frustration is made *fun* by *Monopoly*; frequent *failures* become meaningful *motivation* when *Super Mario* makes it part of the *process* for *saving a princess*; and *trivia nights* transform *test anxiety* into a *problem-solving party*!

Y'see, it's a *fine line* between *frustration* and *recreation* because the *difference* is determined by our *perception* alone. Which makes a *positive* perspective a *top* priority cuz **frustration steals strength but recreation restores it**. I mean, the word "*recreation*" itself comes from the *Latin* verb that means "to *refresh, restore, invigorate, revive*" or as it *literally* implies, to *re-create*. And yet, even our most *exasperating* endeavors can be seen as *refreshing* recreation. *Don't believe me?* Ask Mary Poppins!



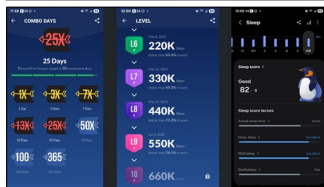
*In every job that must be done,
There is an element of fun
**You find the fun and – SNAP! –
The job's a game!**
And every task you undertake*

*Becomes a piece of cake
A lark! A spree!
It's very clear to see that
A spoonful of sugar
helps the medicine go down*

So, **is your faith fun yet?** It *all depends* on how you see it – if it's a set of *difficult disciplines* that *discourage* you every time it *interferes* with what you *really want*, then *no*, your faith will only *frustrate*. But, if you see it as a life-long *challenge* that *encourages* you every time it *pushes* you to *do one degree better* as you increase in *experience* and find new *levels*, well then, *faith is fun!*



And since faith is how we embrace adversity, **if we can make it a game, we can smile while we struggle**. After all, ol' Mary is just *singing* about what we *already do*, cuz **focusing on fun changes unpleasant chores into enjoyable challenges!** As a kid, my *dad* convinced me *mowing the lawn* was just completing a giant *coloring book*; my grade school *teacher* made me see *arithmetic* as a *race to win* every morning we did *timed tests*; and my *mom* put a *hoop* above my *hamper* to *trick* me into *believing* that *dunking dirty socks* was some kind of *score* to celebrate!



It's called gamification, and *lately*, I've tried to gamify my health by using *apps* to make the *frustrating* disciplines of *rest* and *exercise* more *fun*. And *now*, I am *compelled* to increase the quality of my *sleep*, so I can get up *early* go on a *walk* to keep my *streaks*, earn more *badges*, and *outdo others!* Cuz gamification turns *discipline* into *delight* by using *progress, rewards, competition, and victory* to make us *motivated*.



And in the same way we use health-tracking *apps* or fitness games to gamify training for *physical* health, Paul says spiritual health *also* comes from finding some way to get ourselves *to train*:

Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. – 1 Timothy 4:7-8 NIV

So it's no wonder that whenever Paul wants to share *his motivation* for the way he lives his *faith*, he frequently puts *his perseverance* into a gamified *paradigm*; using a *racing* perspective:

I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible ... for the sake of the Gospel **[But]...Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? [Well, see faith that way and]** Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training ... Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; **[or if you like boxing]** I do not fight like a *boxer* beating the *air*. No, I strike a blow to my *body* and make it my slave so that ... I myself will not be disqualified for the prize. – 1 Corinthians 9:19, 23-27 NIV

So let's take our *cue* to *gamify our perspective* and *find the fun* so – *snap!* – our *faith's* a game!

1. Games change *frustration* into *anticipation* through the joy of *exploration*.

So *see your faith as a treasure hunt, not a to-do list*. Ever *been* treasure hunting? The fun *isn't* just in the *finding* — it's in the *wonder* of what *might* be found. *That's* what *life* is meant to *feel* like. When we wake up asking, "What's God going to show me today?" — *frustration* turns into *anticipation*. And Jesus *invites* us to enjoy the *journey through the mystery* by *faith*:



Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened... – Matthew 7:7 NIV

Call to Me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. – Jeremiah 33:3 NIV



God's truth isn't mastered — it's discovered. So God's *Word* unfolds like a *game board*, revealing *new levels* with each step of faith. And every *obstacle* we experience in His *Word* and *this world* is *designed* to be explored with the *joyful* anticipation of *discovering* an *explanation*.

The kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field... and in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. – Matthew 13:44 NIV

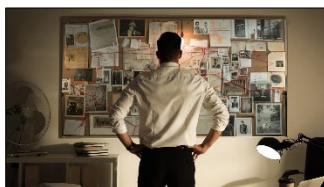
To *enjoy* your *adversity* instead of *whining* about the *work* in your daily *difficulties*, *live your life like you're on a quest to conquer this world* with your *Bible* as a *treasure map*, not a *textbook*.

2. Games change *pain* into *payoff* through the joy of *explanation*.

So, *see your struggles as an investment in the eternal* by *trusting* that all your hard *work* is part of a *temporary process* with *permanent purpose*. I mean, I *proposed* to my wife with an *hours-long* scavenger hunt — *not* to make it *difficult*, but *delightful*. And *each gift* was *wrapped* along the way; *why?* Because *payoffs require a process* — and *games* use *effort* to *elevate* excitement —

[But so does God!] We *glory* in our sufferings, because we know that suffering *produces* perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope [for a payoff] – Romans 5:3–4 NIV

For everyone who *asks* receives; the one who *seeks* finds [eventually!] – Matthew 7:8 NIV



Life is a *series* of spiritual *puzzles* that are *hard* at first but *satisfying* when *solved*. And each trial God gives is just our *training ground* where challenges *equip* our character with *faith* — cuz *answers* hit home *harder* when they've been *earned* through *obedience* and *endurance*.



It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings. – Proverbs 25:2 NIV

And when we know *God hides growth in the daily grind*, we can enjoy *life* as the *experience* we *need* to receive the *explanation* we *want*.

3. Games change *irritation* into *cooperation* through the joy of *connection*.

Listen, **faith ain't a solo quest — it's a team campaign**. And team games force us to find *value* in those who we *otherwise* strive to *tolerate*. For instance, after my wife's "*competitive streak*" ended a few *family* game nights *early* — I *secretly* stocked our closet with every *group* game I could find. And *finally*, she could see her loving *family* as *faithful supporters* instead of *bitter rivals*. Because **the same traits that frustrate us in an enemy — empower us in an ally**. Remember:

The body is *not* made up of *one* part but of many. — 1 Corinthians 12:14 NIV

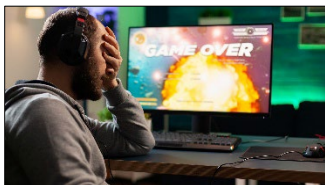


Therefore encourage one another and build each other up **[cuz you're gonna need them to do the same!]** — 1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV



We tend to forget that life is *harder* when we're on our own cuz *cooperation* can be *challenging* — but we all *know* that sharing **victories makes them sweeter** and **sharing losses makes them lighter**. And *spiritual maturity* means seeing the people around you as *assets*, not *adversaries*. So don't just play alone, join the campaign and try to see others as *teammates* who are helping you *train* as you *connect*, *compete*, *support*, and *celebrate* as *one*!

4. Games transform *failure* into *victory* through the joy of *completion*.



Above all, if we want your *faith* to be *fun*, **we gotta see life as a game that we play to win**. But if you've ever played a video game, you *know* you *rarely* beat a level on your first try. So, *remember* each failed attempt builds *skill*, strengthens *strategy*, and brings *victory* into view.



[The way Paul sees the end of all his effort:] I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, **I have kept the faith**. — 2 Timothy 4:7 NIV

[And Paul made it despite his failures, cuz he knew:] God did not appoint us to *suffer wrath* but to receive salvation — 1 Thessalonians 5:9 NIV

Let's be clear, **we never win on accident — victory is the reward of faithful repetition**. Like the game *Foldit*. It was an app that gamified *science* by having *players* solve complex *protein puzzles*. And because *thousands* of *users* produced *millions* of *failures*, they cracked an HIV enzyme structure in *10 days* that experts *hadn't* solved in *15 years*. Well, likewise, **our failures should be seen as a means to the game's end — leveling up a faith that ends in immortality**. Like Jesus said:

To the one who is *victorious*, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne — Revelation 3:21 NIV

Listen, there are *Bible* apps that *chart progress*, track *streaks*, and award *badges*; there are *podcasts* to *push* you past common *frustrations* of *faith*, there are *fellowship groups* to *team up* against *your* spiritual struggles, and there is a *Savior* who already *beat the game* to give you *hope*! And they all exist to help make *discipline* a *delight* so you can *find joy* in your *fight*. Cuz when you *do*, **you won't just whistle while you work — you'll grin while you win! So game on!**

Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.