



Episode 78: Recreation: The Gospel At Play - Part 1

Featuring: Mingo Palacios & Jay Johnson & Erick Thoennes

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Transcript:

Mingo Palacios: [00:05](#) Welcome to the Purpose Driven Church Podcast, where we sit down with leaders in and around the church to discuss current trends and challenges and how the five purposes of the local church matter today, more than ever.

Mingo Palacios: [00:22](#) Hey everybody. Welcome to the PD podcast. My name is Mingo and if you hear any ambient noises because we're actually podcasting today, this episode, from the deck outside of Hume Lake's Ponderosa Lodge in the King's Canyon National Park.

Jay Johnson: [00:40](#) The Deepest Canyon in North America.

Mingo Palacios: [00:42](#) The Deepest Canyon in North America, putting itself on display for us. There was no way we were going to contain this conversation to a dark studio with great acoustics. "No," I said, "We will go to where God has put his glory on display." So that's where the episode is today. Again, we've got pastor Erik Thoennes from La Mirada, Evangelical Free Church, probably flipped those.

Erik Thoennes: [01:05](#) Grace Evangelical Free Church of La Mirada.

Mingo Palacios: [01:05](#) Grace! I apologize! [laughing]

Jay Johnson: [01:05](#) You do something at Biola too don't you?

Erik Thoennes: [01:11](#) I do.

Mingo Palacios: [01:13](#) Also professor extraordinaire, father, bishop, arch thinker for the masses, Mr. Erik Thoennes. Also, Jay and John joining us today on the podcast, fellow Hume residents and directors/ employers/servants of the masses. Good to have you guys today.

Jay Johnson: [01:37](#) Thanks.

Erik Thoennes: [01:37](#) Good to be here today.

Erik Thoennes: [01:39](#) Today we talk about recreation. We were trying to get to it in the last episode, but went on some incredible tangents, including Moby Dick, including the sacredness of time and attention with our families, that glorious digital device that you're probably listening to this conversation on. But today we hold it,

we reserved the conversation strictly for recreation or as we were about to start talking, the gospel at play.

Jay Johnson: [02:09](#)

The gospel at play.

Erik Thoennes: [02:10](#)

That's right. That's a Hume expression.

Jay Johnson: [02:14](#)

We love.

Erik Thoennes: [02:14](#)

That's a Hume phrase that I love, the gospel at play. What does the gospel and play have to do with each other? Gospel is a serious thing.

Jay Johnson: [02:23](#)

Yes it is.

Mingo Palacios: [02:23](#)

And play, not so serious, but you can, you can be serious about play though.

Jay Johnson: [02:31](#)

It's our two favorite things at Hume Lake. The gospel and playing, like having fun recreating, that's a big part of our daily programs during the summer, during the winter camps, all of our retreats, in fact. And so you put those two things together in beautiful California up in the mountains of 5,200 feet and it is Hume Lake Christian camp.

Erik Thoennes: [02:56](#)

And I'm not sure how conscious it is in all the staff counselors, but I love that it doesn't seem like it's gospel then play. It's gospel at play. It's a seamless thing where the gospel doesn't stop when you play and that's a beautiful thing. It's infused, play is infused in the gospel and the gospel is the framework for play in our lives and at Hume Lake Christian Camps.

- Mingo Palacios: [03:26](#) So Erik, you've got some hours in your life that have been dedicated to the topic of recreation. You just recently, did you submit something, did you recently finish something?
- Erik Thoennes: [03:39](#) I did an essay on recreation and the New World View Study Bible just came out and I wrote a chapter in a book on Christian theology of sport on the concept of play. And I see play and recreation as very related ideas.
- Mingo Palacios: [03:54](#) I would have to say that the average pastor isn't taking stock in his life on how much play and recreation he's putting under his belt in comparison to all other things that would matter to us in the job description of a leader or a pastor, whether it's by occupation or it's in a lay expression. So, connect the dots for us. Help us maybe see something that we've not yet seen or consider something that we've never considered, from your vantage point.
- Erik Thoennes: [04:31](#) Right, so I think we need to take God as seriously as we possibly can, but when we do that, we end up not taking ourselves seriously. Doesn't mean we don't take our lives seriously because God's working in our lives for eternal purposes, but because God is sovereign and God is the one who holds our lives in his hands and he's the determiner of all things that happen. It means that we don't have to feel the burden of being a sovereign God, which can infuse our lives with a restfulness, a playfulness, an approach to life that isn't burdened, isn't frenetically

running around trying to accomplish everything that God ultimately is going to accomplish anything. Anyway, so a playfulness, a Sabbath infused into our lives, I think needs to be a hallmark of the Christian.

Jay Johnson: [05:34](#) That was beautiful.

[05:35](#) [laughing]

Jay Johnson: [05:36](#) That was beautiful.

Mingo Palacios: [05:37](#) I'm just resting in it. You know what it is; it's the environment that's kind of like sweeping me away right now.

Erik Thoennes: [05:45](#) There's general revelation everywhere.

Mingo Palacios: [05:47](#) You know, I do believe that. I do appreciate that. Give me a sense of, you know, we use the word rhythm.

Erik Thoennes: [05:55](#) Yeah.

Mingo Palacios: [05:55](#) If there ought to a rhythm for a listener, a human, a child of God, a leader, does the ratio exist? Is there a golden ratio? Is there one that should be higher tuned for people who are of higher demand? What's your observation even in your own personal life?

Erik Thoennes: [06:18](#) I think in a schedule there should be recreation, rest, places for naps and wiffle ball games infused into your whole life. But I think primarily we should think in an integrated life so that I don't just rest on the weekends or on Sunday or when I carve out time for it, there should be a restfulness even when I'm hard at

work. Even when life is really difficult, there should be a playfulness infused into our whole lives. So, I have a friend who was raised in Japan and he tells me that Japanese culture has a hard time, for instance, infusing playfulness and humor into normal life, which is why Japanese game show hosts are so completely wacky if you've ever seen-

[07:09](#)

[laughing]

Erik Thoennes:

[07:09](#)

Because the wackiness is segmented out into areas they think, "Okay, now we can be this way" and it's just off the wall.

Mingo Palacios:

[07:19](#)

Yeah, it's segmented; it's compartmentalized.

Erik Thoennes:

[07:21](#)

Exactly.

Jay Johnson:

[07:23](#)

Compartmentalized.

Erik Thoennes:

[07:23](#)

Yes and so integrated playfulness, restfulness, recreation in our lives where in all of life we view everything in light of the ultimate outcome of all of it. And that's really the key. Jürgen Moltmann, the ultimate theologian on play, believe it or not, wrote a book called The Theology of Play and he begins the book that he wrote at the end of the 1960's by saying, "How can we play when people are dying everyday in Vietnam?" And his whole answer to that revolves around the idea of hope because we have hope even when people are dying every day, we can have a playfulness in our daily lives. We can have a

restfulness in our daily lives even as we work to see the gospel advance with all our might.

Mingo Palacios: [08:16](#) It makes me think of the word that comes to my mind is either the word perspective or vantage point.

Erik Thoennes: [08:24](#) Yeah.

Mingo Palacios: [08:25](#) Because if you have a shallow vantage point or a short perspective, you're not able to see the bigger picture that says, "You know what, between now and then I do have room to breathe. I have room to enjoy this." Where like a rushed soul or a rushed person, he'll put all the things that need to get done and he'll x out the non-negotiables.

Erik Thoennes: [08:53](#) Very well said.

Mingo Palacios: [08:56](#) So the first thing that gets sacrificed is anything that's leisurely, anything that's filling anything that is rejuvenating, strangely enough. It's like they say, "You don't have time not to pray about this" you know, that phrase?

Erik Thoennes: [09:13](#) Right. Too busy to pray not to pray.

Mingo Palacios: [09:15](#) Exactly. That's kind of the same thing. Would you say that recreation or the ability to 'appreciate the bumblebee' like you said in the last episode, that would be all inside of that same category, that we ought to be able to tune our focus enough to say, "The immediacy of life isn't worth sacrificing that which brings joy, particularly through recreation."

Erik Thoennes: [09:40](#) Yeah, so well said. The Bible is constantly trying to get us to live our daily lives in light of how it all is going to end. So, that wedding banquet that's coming one day when Jesus comes for his bride is what we live in light of. The judgment day that comes with that, the complete consummation and restoration of all things is what we live in light of and the surety of that gives our lives profound confidence and a restfulness even in the midst of a lot of activity.

Mingo Palacios: [10:10](#) That's good.

Jay Johnson: [10:10](#) And even here at Hume, you see people laugh or we do something from the platform and it just puts people's minds at ease and allows them to relax and then take in, I think, whatever we're doing for the rest of the time.

John: [10:30](#) It softens the heart.

Jay Johnson: [10:31](#) Yeah, that's a great point, John. It softens the heart.

Mingo Palacios: [10:32](#) It's a tenderizer.

Jay Johnson: [10:34](#) A tenderizer.

Erik Thoennes: [10:34](#) Yeah and it seems like it takes great wisdom to attain the balance between a life that has a lightheartedness because Jesus is going to make it all right one day. But also a sober, circumspect, a life that's not trivial or flippant, that's the balance because an American flippancy can undermine an earnestness that believes that Satan prowls around like a roaring lion seeking

whom he will destroy. And the souls of men and women in our lives are profoundly affected by our prayerlessness, our prayerfulness, our consistency and faithfulness and gospel proclamation, so to take our calling as Christians so seriously, but ultimately trust it all to God so that we don't get burdened by this beyond what God would ever want us to seem to be the key. It's easy to be trivial and flippant and irreverent and it's easy to be just somber and serious all the time, but to be a well balanced person in my affections and the way I live, that has a well informed, theologically driven understanding of the seriousness of everyday to make the most of every opportunity, but ultimately leave it all in the hands of God. That's a tough balance.

Jay Johnson: [12:06](#)

I have a question. Erik, do you feel like that's a learned-

Mingo Palacios: [12:08](#)

Discipline.

Jay Johnson: [12:11](#)

Discipline or is that a natural discipline in your life?

Erik Thoennes: [12:18](#)

Well, maybe a bit of biography here is important. I had a really rough home life childhood and I say sometimes that play and humor saved my life. It was a perspective giving, so playing especially in the area of sports and laughter and I found out early on I could make people laugh and it brought some social acceptance I didn't have. Those things like that easily become idols. We live to laugh. If you're living to laugh, you're never really going to laugh in the way

God wants you to. If you're living to play, it won't be true play. And so only when your heart at the work of what God calls us to only when you take him very seriously, only when you work hard for six days, can a Sabbath truly be a Sabbath.

Mingo Palacios: [13:13](#) Yes, come on.

Erik Thoennes: [13:13](#) And if those things end up becoming the ultimate, if laughing, if being funny, if having a playful life becomes my ultimate, then it becomes an idol and it actually sucks the life out of those things and doesn't give me what they're intended to give. So, when God's the end, laughter can be a great gift from him. Things like sleep too are fascinating. The Bible talks about sleep as something that the righteous are capable of doing at a depth that other people can't. So David says, "I can sleep." Think about David being hunted down by crazy Saul-

Mingo Palacios: [13:53](#) With all that's happening in this world.

Erik Thoennes: [13:53](#) He's able to sleep. And the psalms talk about sleep, which is a very related idea to play and recreation and rest. Sleep is, as I said in the last podcast, an expression of our finitude, our frailty or weakness. And you can only sleep if you have some degree of security that you're experiencing. If we believe God's got our lives in his hands, we can sleep soundly. And so I think when those things aren't ultimate is when we can actually experience them the way God wants us to.

Jay Johnson: [14:24](#) That's awesome.

Mingo Palacios: [14:24](#) Do you think that there are generations that somehow land on this better than others? I'm always observing generations from one to the other. I have like a whole set of college friends that say, "Mingo, I did it. I'm on fun employment." Like, where they're not having to work, they're getting this fixed check and can't find a job and that's like the equation is like, "I get to have fun now because I'm not working, but I've a regular income." And I'm going, "Oh, I think that's the wrong way to approach life, my friend." But it seems to be these shortcuts. I think you started to tap on it a little bit, Erik, where you said if it becomes the crutch or the idle or if it becomes the thing that you hold fast to instead of your Savior, you could be missing the bigger truth, the bigger fulfillment, the bigger 'aha'.

Erik Thoennes: [15:16](#) Honestly, what you just described, Mingo, makes my stomach hurt.

Mingo Palacios: [15:19](#) I'm sorry about that. I apologize.

[15:20](#) [laughing]

Erik Thoennes: [15:20](#) Because it's completely missing the goodness of work. Work is a pre-fall reality God created, told us to rule over and subdue, be fruitful and multiply, steward creation as his co-creators along with him. Work is a good thing. Now, it's got thorns and thistles, sweat of the brow, post curse and fall but there's a goodness to it that endures. In this idea that "I'm living for the weekend, I'm living to the point where I finally don't

have to work" well, you're not going to enjoy heaven because I believe heaven is filled with good work where the relentless difficulty of it in a cursed world will be gone, but it'll still be challenging, require creativity and engagement and investment and fun.

Mingo Palacios: [16:12](#)

I love this.

Erik Thoennes: [16:12](#)

And so if we have a view of work that is a gift from God, it's only then that rest will be what it's intended to be, that Sabbath and play will be what it's intended to be. If it's what I live for, it actually robs the joy from it.

Mingo Palacios: [16:28](#)

There you go.

Jay Johnson: [16:28](#)

Well, and you can make work fun. I mean, there's times when we're getting down and just grinding away at work and the what we're supposed to do, but when you make it fun and people laugh, they will go the distance. There are seasons in life where stress comes on and the pressure of getting the task done and you get in that grind and it just grinds away at you. That's why it's called the grind, right? And yet, when you infuse some laughter, when I go and jump on my staff and all of a sudden we're wrestling or doing stuff like that. We've got a guy here who's like the king of that. They used to have these wrestle matches in the back of R.V.'s that were driving down the road when they were going to leadership retreat.

[17:21](#)

[laughing]

- John: [17:22](#) These are some Hume secrets, right?
- Mingo Palacios: [17:24](#) You heard it here first folks. You heard it here first.
- Jay Johnson: [17:32](#) There were seatbelt laws back in that day. I wasn't in there.
- Erik Thoennes: [17:37](#) But I have been a part of times when like I've just noticed I've got to have more fun with the team and make it a part of our culture and laugh and play. The response from the team was drastic and dramatic in my relationship with them and what they then were motivated to do. And it was incredible. So that balance of work and I would agree with you Erik, it's important to work and such a part of life and the rhythms of life and that's how God has made us.
- Mingo Palacios: [18:16](#) That's good. I love how you said that it was a pre-fall mandate. That's really important to pay attention to because you think of all the toil and responsibility that came, it was crafted pre-fall in the garden to manage, to work, to own.
- Erik Thoennes: [18:34](#) I think it'll be a heavenly reality to clearly that this isn't something that we we're finally done with work. We're done with the toilsomeness of it in a fallen world, but not work itself. That's a gift from God. We're created to be fruitful and that requires an invested work ethic. The Protestant work ethic is one of the great forgotten doctrines of the Reformation and it doesn't mean we just work hard. It means we see every thing any Christians in whatever vocations, is called to, is the work of the Lord. Luther said, "The milkmaid is doing

the work of the Lord." We don't have milkmaids anymore. We have machines doing it, which actually is an entirely other podcast we're going to do.

Mingo Palacios: [19:14](#)

We have to talk about it. Yes!

Erik Thoennes: [19:18](#)

Technology distancing us from the work in a way where it's not humanizing, but that's different podcast.

Mingo Palacios: [19:26](#)

In our tech and work podcast we'll tackle those topics.

[19:31](#)

[laughing]

Mingo Palacios: [19:31](#)

Okay, but the generation, because here's what I'm thinking, you have 18 to 28 year olds discovering, you know what it is to touch work for the first time. Arguably. Very estimate here in this like range, 28 to 38, you catch rhythms, 38 to 48 years you're getting into the mastery, 48 to 58, you figured it out, 58 to 68, you're making your plans for slowing, 68 to 78, you retire. Is that the end of fun? Is that the beginning of fun? This is the culture thing I'm talking about. The generational idea of recreation, I love if I'm at least picking it up, right Erik? It's a shuffling of the deck that allows you to enter, leave recreation, but man, our culture would say "Grind really hard for a few years." Right? What does it say? "Eat crap for a few so you can have caviar the rest of your life." I'm summarizing that statement.

Jay Johnson: [20:32](#)

Do you eat caviar, Mingo?

- Mingo Palacios: [20:32](#) I don't but I like Sardines on pizza. That's the generation thing because I think everybody is wondering, especially in a pastoral role, "So, what about retirement?"
- Jay Johnson: [20:45](#) Yeah. I think we all have different expressions of how we recreate and play and laugh and get our minds off of the grind or even during the grind and just watching a grandfather with his grandchildren and seeing them play and that rest, even in those times whether they're still working or even if they're retired is oh so important and so beautiful in so many ways. And I so look forward to it, but I still try to make sure that I am doing stuff, I'm playing soccer or baseball with my kids and I'm not even athletic, but like even like just wrestling in the wrestling on the ground and playing and making them laugh. It's just so a part of who we are as God's creation.
- Erik Thoennes: [21:37](#) Yeah and not even to just reserve it for those recreation times as I've said before, but when you're doing dishes to flick a little suds across the-
- Jay Johnson: [21:47](#) Yes!
- [21:47](#) [laughing]
- Mingo Palacios: [21:47](#) I love that!
- Erik Thoennes: [21:48](#) As a dad, I want my kids to say, "My dad is really serious about God, really serious about hating sin, really serious about making his life work, but he's fun, he's playful. When we wash the car together, yes, he

wants to get the car washed, but invariably he's going to shoot me with the hose before the things done and we'll end up laughing and making a mess in." It'll be a foretaste of heaven. There was a great quote I read a long time ago in an article on humor and it was, "Self control is just training wheels for heaven when we are lost in wonder, love and praise." And this life in this sinful world is filled with lots of self-control, but on the way home, there will come a day where our lives aren't marked by self-control but by a kind of release of worship and joy and I would say playfulness. It's amazing how often images of the Eschaton, of that eternal state we'll live in one day, are children playing unhurt by snakes in the streets.

Mingo Palacios: [23:02](#)

Unbridled.

Erik Thoennes: [23:02](#)

Yes, by images of a young deer being led out of a stall and just leaping. It's not utilitarian. It's not pragmatic. It's not results oriented. It's exuberant, expressive, joy and worship that has a playfulness.

Mingo Palacios: [23:24](#)

We hope today's insights left you feeling inspired and propelled towards your greatest potential. Thanks again for joining us for another episode of the PD Podcast. Until next time.

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