



SUMMER DAZE • NEW HOPE CHURCH

God in the Everyday Fun

July 19, 2026 • Rusty

RUSTY

I really appreciate what Amanda and Nick and Julie and all the staff are doing with our camp. It's so cool. And when kids learn young to do something for others, the world doesn't just revolve around them. There's something really valuable that happens there. And that's, Camp Whatakid, that's been its legacy for, is this 19? I think it's been going 19 years. It's maybe the 19th summer.

Switching gears, I've got a lot of memories as a kid, and the ones I had about church and God and faith were not good ones. I grew up with this idea, and again, it could have just been my interpretation, but that if you're in the faith, you're really serious, you're stern, you're It can't be any fun. And God is just looking down on us to catch us doing something fun so he can zap us with lightning or whatever. I mean, this is just the way it grew up. And sometimes I heard people say, God's watching. And now, granted, some of the things I thought were fun, he would not have approved of. Neither did the police and some other people. But I don't think it's a wrong view that somehow God is a killjoy.

When I became a follower of Jesus, I discovered there's a, I met people that really had this kind of joy in them. And it was, they enjoyed life. They had fun together. They could laugh. You read through the New Testament and read about Jesus. And he was, people were attracted to him, not because he was always going around stern and screaming at them. I mean, there was something approachable about him. He could speak the truth, but he always spoke the truth in love. And I can imagine him and the disciples sitting around campfires and being in people's homes telling stories and laughing. You read some of his parables, and he had a great sense of humor.

And this idea of fun, I think so many times it's been misunderstood. And I'm going to, some stuff I've never studied before, I'm going to get into some of that later on in the message. But I just want us to think about this. We're thinking about the summer. We're going to do a three-part series on that. And today we're looking at this idea of fun. And I want to read to you a passage from the Old Testament. This is Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes, the actual word means the preacher.

It's probably written by King Solomon, who would have been the perfect one to do this. He would have been a little bit like an Elon Musk president at the time. And I don't mean, think whatever you want to about Musk. He's the wealthiest guy in the world. Solomon was that way. Solomon was extremely wealthy. He'd been exposed to all kind of things. He was a king. He had hundreds of wives and concubines. Now, that was a different time. We're not pushing that agenda anymore. I don't understand how you could have more than

one husband and wife and still survive, but that's... Anyway, I love Becky, but... You don't want more than one of us, I'm telling you right now.

But anyway, so Solomon used all of his wealth, all of his ability, all the things that he had the capacity to do and to explore philosophically what's life about. He tried all kinds of things, everything. Anything money could buy, he could do it. And from his vantage point, after exploring all these things, and if you read through Ecclesiastes, you'll see this, is he came away and he said, it's all meaningless, or in the old translation, it's all vanity. He said, all the stuff that you can explore in life is worthless unless it's anchored in God. And if you read Ecclesiastes, go all the way to the end, because he's exposing so much stuff. One commentator, I really love what he said, he goes, Ecclesiastes, when you read it, you find that skepticism and despair melt away when they're viewed as our life is a gift from God and we get to walk with him.

So I want to read to you a passage from there. Let me just say this too about reading our Bibles. I think it's become out of fashion for us to do it. I think we're glad to have other people tell us what to think. I want to encourage you. I have the Quest Study Bible is the one I use. It's a modern translation, but it's got some questions and stuff. In fact, they wrote this as if it was if any of these passages were in a press conference, what would a good reporter ask so that you can have answers as you're moving along, like who wrote Ecclesiastes? What does he mean by meaningless survey? It's excellent, but get yourself a Bible and read it. We do our Bible reading plan here, which I think is excellent. I'm glad we do it, but We need to build our faith. And you're not going to do that apart from having a strong diet of what God says is true.

I've got this new bracelet. I was just given it today. A friend told me he had done it. And it's got all these initials on it and said, what would Jesus have avoided to get out of this situation? And it's a reminder to me that God's word always is a protection for me. When I follow it, I'm in good place. But when I don't, when I decide to go on my own, I'm gonna always get in trouble and I might lead others into trouble too. So anyway, that's just a plug for getting a Bible, a study Bible and reading it.

This part I'm gonna read to you from Ecclesiastes. Some of you that have ever heard the song Turn, Turn, Turn by the Byrds. It was a group back in the 60s. It was number one in billboard chart. It's almost word for word for what I'm gonna read to you. Who would have thought a rock song would have been quoting scripture?

But you've probably heard, just listen to this, he goes, for everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. A time to be born, a time to die, a time to plant, a time to harvest. A time to kill, a time to heal, a time to tear down, a time to build up. A time to cry, a time to laugh, a time to grieve, and a time to dance. A time to scatter stones, a time to gather stones, a time to embrace, a time to turn away. A time to search and a time to quit searching. A time to keep and a time to throw away. A time to tear, a time to mend, a time to be quiet, a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

We tend to lock into one or the other of things and what he's saying is he's explored life and it's full of all kind of ands. This and that. He goes on to say... What do people really get out of all their hard work in life? I've seen the burden God has placed on us all, yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people can't see the whole scope of God's work from

beginning to end. In other words, there's something about us being human that we long for something more. We believe there is more Possible. We just don't know what it is. We're not sure where to land.

And he finishes. He goes, so I conclude that there's nothing better than to be happy and enjoy ourselves as long as we can. There's something about us enjoying our life and recognizing that God is in the midst of all of it. And where I'm heading, I don't have to go alone. And when I don't go alone, I can find meaning. I can find hope. I can find strength.

We're not here merely to strive and survive or just to retire. Our lives have more meaning than that. God wants us to be responsible with it, and he wants us along the way to have some fun. And that's what we're going to look at today.

There's another passage in the Bible that's really important and will guide everything we do from the rest of this service. And it's available to us and appropriate at any age and stage you're in. Ephesians 5 says, so be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. Don't be drunk with wine because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit. Let me just take a few pieces of this.

Don't live like fools. It doesn't mean that you're an idiot. It just means that a fool is someone that decides, I'm going to go by how I think and how I feel regardless of what God says. In fact, I don't really care what he says. I'm sure this must be right. It's a foolish way to operate. Making the most of every opportunity means that right now I have a chance to live and to make a difference.

These evil days, well, that's all we ever hear, isn't it? How bad things are. How terrible they are. I can focus on that, and I can get discouraged, I can get down, or I can just say, you know, this is the time I live in, and God has given me opportunities. He wants me to make the most of it.

Don't act thoughtlessly. That's basically living on autopilot. I'm going to go through the motions. I'm just going to do this. Everyone else does. But those of us that know Jesus, we operate very differently.

And then there's verse 18. It says, don't be drunk with wine because that would ruin your life. Some of us, and don't raise any hands. I'll raise mine. Some of us have had DUIs, driving under the influence. I haven't had any recently. This was before I followed Jesus' days.

And the idea is you're driving under the influence of something that's not good for you, something that's keeping you from being in your right mind. What we're hearing is don't drive under the influence of wine or alcohol or marijuana, whatever it is. You need to live under the influence of something else, and that's God's Spirit and God's Word. This is how we get to live. It's what's presented to us. I can live under God's influence in whatever circumstance I'm in right this minute. I can make the most of the opportunity.

So, make the most of every opportunity, not the least. and approach what's going on, and especially in the summertime. We've got all kind of opportunities in front of us. There's vacation. There's much more daylight, so people are out doing stuff. You're going to the pool. You're doing sports. You're traveling. You've got

guests coming into you because you live near D.C., and they can come and stay with you for free. They can go visit all the monuments and all that. I mean, there's just a lot that goes on. It's a busy time. School's out and all that, and I've been thinking about that a lot as we're thinking about the series.

And then I saw these two phrases in one verse in that Ecclesiastes passage we read. It said, there is a time to cry, a time to laugh, a time to grieve, and a time to dance. And I started, I'm going to do a little research on this. I know I disappointed Becky because I'm not focusing on the dance one because I don't know how and I don't really want to.

I got in trouble with the nine o'clock service because When I came in, Becky said, well, don't startle me like that because she's singing with everybody else and she doesn't know how to sing without a lot of moving parts. And she banged into me and she goes, I don't want to hurt you. Did I do it better this time? Not really. I've never been, that's just not me. I'm more stump oriented when it comes to, but laughing is the one that I wanted to study.

I've never studied laughter really, so I did a bunch of research, and I'm gonna give you what I've found out. And I'm using sources from National Institute of Health, Mayo Clinic, Harvard, and Stanford. There's a bunch of other stuff that's been done on this. The scientific study of laughter is gelatology. Did you know that? Are there any gelatologists here? It's actually a field of medicine. Studying laughter. I imagine they have some really good staff meetings too, but this was started by a guy named William Fry at Stanford. They've always seen that laughter had some measurable impact on people's lives. Adjustment in mood in a positive way, it can help reduce the impact of depression, relieve anxiety and stress. And you all know that. When something's going on, if you're able to laugh, you watch a show that's funny, or someone says something funny, or someone falls, and then you're like, ah, that was funny. And you feel a little bit better, at least for a little while.

But they've done other research showing not just the psychological benefit, but physiological changes that happen when we laugh. There's a whole group of medical people that fall into this field. It's called psychoneuroimmunology. Are there any psychoneuroimmunologists here? It's only been about 10 or 15 years, but there are people that actually study the physical benefits of laughter. Here's some of the stuff that they've come up with that they're able to measure. When you and I laugh, it aids the body in releasing, and I didn't know what these were, neuropeptides. Anyone know what neuropeptides are? I've heard of peptides. Have you?

In the 9 o'clock service, we had someone that raised their hand, and I felt like a fool because they were like 12 years old. And they're looking at me like, don't you read? But anyway, neuropeptides, apparently they help fight stress. Who would have known? Well, that person did at 9 o'clock.

Laughter appears to reduce cortisol levels in our body. It's a stress hormone, and it impacts us in all kind of ways. And in two ways, they've been able to measure it. When you reduce cortisol, you're able to remember things better, and you can learn things better. Laughter can reduce pain by causing your body to produce its own painkillers, dopamine and endorphins. We've heard about those before. We actually can produce those internally, and laughter helps with that. It improves our mood by increasing our serotonin levels. They've

measured all this stuff. It can improve your heart health by stimulating blood and oxygen flow. It's like a good workout. This is laughing. And it's the cheapest medicine you'll ever find. You don't even need good RX for this. You just need some people around you that will help with it.

And the thing about laughter, and I'm a little nervous when I see someone that's all by themselves laughing because I'm wondering what's really going on there. But for the most part, laughter, it's a social connection that we have. It gives us common ground with other people. It reduces tension. It brings comfort. It's I just never have studied it that much. I've seen it. I'm going to give you some examples in a few minutes. In fact, I'll give you a few right now.

Three weeks ago, I did a wedding in Maryland, and one of the family members on the groom's side was starting to have some odd symptoms, slurring speech, not able to walk very well. I got her to the hospital and found out she had a brain tumor. and they needed to operate on it really quickly. In fact, they did a first surgery, did the biopsy, came back and had to do another one. It was very serious. I went to the hospital to see her right before the first surgery, and I walk in, and we're talking, and I don't really know her, but then she says something, and I've talked to the surgeon, and I'm hoping that I'll be able to learn some new languages while they're in there, if they could just mess around and get things kind of working better. if they could also do an eyelid lift while I'm in there too, that would be great. I mean, she's getting ready to have major exploratory surgery for this tumor, yet she's able to find some humor in the midst of it. Did it make the tumor go away? It did not. But it did reduce some of the strain that she was feeling in those around her work.

There's something about laughter that is really, really helpful. I'm with a group. We started a while back with Jeff Salino called the Cancer Cowboys. It's a group of men that have struggled with cancer. Guys typically aren't really good about the relational part, so we just have guys meeting together. And we've had some great meetings, and we've laughed some. Prostate cancer isn't funny, but some things that go along with cancer treatment and other things can be. Like, it's really funny watching someone walk down a hall with one of those hospital gowns that don't have a rear covering in it, especially if it's someone else. It's really funny. There are other things. I mean, it doesn't take the cancer away. It doesn't make cancer fun, but it reduces some of the pressure that people feel when they're wrestling with it. And you get that. You know that's true.

When you're with others and you can get really caught up in how negative and how bad and how ugly something is, that doesn't really, it's not helpful and you don't usually make very good decisions in the midst of that. But if we can find a way to put some humor in there, something where we can laugh, something where we can defuse it, it can make a huge, huge difference.

I'm going to tell the story better than I did at nine. Becky and I, when we travel, we've done this a few times at the airport and The question has come up, what happens if there's an active shooter at the airport? Active shooters are not funny. There's nothing about that that's funny. How we chose to approach it did have some of that. Like Becky and I were talking and she looked at me one time and she goes, I could probably jump up and jump over the ticket taker's counter, couldn't I? And then I could be back there and have older people and kids come over and I could protect them. And I'm looking at her and I'm thinking, There's no way in the world you're going to leap over that counter. I don't care how many active shooters are in the building. And

then she said something like this, well, what if I just jumped in that trash can? And I'm thinking... That's a plastic trash can. I don't believe that's going to really help. So we laugh at the airport quite a bit.

She also wanted me to say something that made me look stupid, and I've got a few of those. I'll give you one that happened a few Thanksgivings ago that our family has found funny. It wasn't funny that day. It has become funny since then. We're eating our Thanksgiving dinner around the table. Everything's going well until I start choking on some turkey. And I just got up and left the table. I went back to the bathroom and started doing the Heimlich on myself. You can do that if you've got a countertop like this and you just bang your chest into the countertop. I thought this makes sense. My daughter didn't think that was a wise call and she came in and burst into the bathroom really angry at me for not asking someone to come do the heimlich for me i i was successful and i i didn't die or anything like that but every thanksgiving since then i've been mercilessly ribbed and it's really hurt my feelings i'm just saying it right now that humor helps laughing brings us together

I do want to say two things about laughing. One is if you're laughing at others, make sure they're part of it and you're not using them in a harmful way. That's completely out of bounds. Another thing is don't use humor or laughter to avoid problems. It can diffuse. It can take tension away. But some of us like to, I'm just going to make a joke and hope that no one ever brings this up again. That's not the point. There are things we need to face. And if you read through Ecclesiastes, he's talking about there are times for serious, there's time for fun. But don't just do one or the other. Don't ignore tough things. But I'll tell you, I've been in meetings before where you can diffuse a situation with laughter so that you can now attack a problem well and do it together.

So anyway, let me go back to the passage that was in Ephesians where it says, don't be drunk with wine because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit. And the point I want to make there for us to think about is don't find yourself checking out in situations. Check in. Prayerfully look for ways to connect and reduce tension and offer hope. in whatever circumstance you're in, and step in as God's partner. We have all kind of opportunities around us, especially in the summertime where we have more connections, where we can get involved in people's lives in a healthy, God-honoring way. And we can use humor to make these connections. We can have fun together.

And I'm going to mention Becky because she's one of the best examples to me in this. I've watched her. She'll go for a walk in our neighborhood, and sometimes it'll take her forever because she's run into people. And what she's doing is she's trying to build connections with people, not because she wants to have this huge collection of great people that think she's wonderful. She's trying to find inroads to let them get a taste of who Jesus is. to build a relationship with them and being able to talk to them about him. She does this in our neighborhood. She does it at the grocery store and doctor's offices and all this. Look for ways to build connection, and humor does it. Find something that you can have in common. And I'm going to tell you, politics probably isn't the way to do it. But you can, there's always something that you can find if you're willing to look and you're willing to, and even if it's just making fun of yourself, that's okay. Some of us need to take ourselves much less seriously than we do.

Proverbs 12, 25 says, worry weighs us down, but a cheerful word picks us up. There's all kind of people around you. You're going to run into people today. You're going to see them tomorrow. You're going to see them at work, in your neighborhood, wherever you are. that are carrying all kind of heavy stuff. And by you offering something kind, cheerful, funny, humorous, and connecting with them, you may open the door for them to feel like, there's someone maybe I could trust. Maybe they'll tell you something, you say, well, at least can I pray for you? If they still have some of the muffins left, buy a box of muffins or cookies or something and take that to one of your neighbors or friends. Just tell them, I was thinking about you. It's easy to do kind things. It's easy to get connected if we'll decide to do it and take our eyes off of ourselves.

Ephesians 4.29 also gives us some more guidance. It says, don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. We're in all kind of environments where we can help change the atmosphere. by using our words carefully and wisely. Complaining and whining, that does not do it. It feels good in the moment. You might get a laugh because you've whined about somebody, but that's not the kind of laughter that is helpful. We're talking about how do I build connections with the people around me? And it could be someone that is really difficult.

My dad was never known to be that funny. He was tough. He was stern. He was cold at times. But when you got him laughing, it actually, there were times he would cry he was laughing so hard because it was new to him. It was like something he just, it was almost like he didn't have permission to do it or something changed, especially once he became a Christian. He saw life differently. We get to help people see things that maybe they miss. And worry and fear and anger and all that blind us to what's really going on.

Let me give you one more quick story. And I hope you'll take the take-home sheet and do something with that today or tomorrow, and do it with somebody, and just walk through the questions. Say, I wonder how we could do this. I wonder how we could add some fun or some humor in our relationships.

We were taking a family vacation one time. We were in the car, and something came. We would talk a lot about stuff. We didn't do video in the car. We'd do music. But something came up, and our son Joseph, he was middle school, I think, at the time, and he goes... Well, I'm really mad. Someone at school called me stupid. And he didn't like it at all. He was really upset about it and really worked up about it. And as we were talking, he said, you know what you can do the next time someone says you're stupid? This will work, I promise. Look at him and say, I'm stupid and you'll ever be. Watch what happens. And then some of you are thinking, what a horrible parent you are.

But if you can diffuse something with humor, it changes the dynamic. See, he was letting someone get under his skin because they said he was stupid. But if he was willing to, and we helped him think through, how do you do this differently? Say, I'm stupider than you'll ever be. How do you come back with that? Well, no. No, that's not right. That means I'm stupid. But there are ways we do, and we can do that together. We can help each other out. It's part of being part of a community. There are things that we wrestle with and someone else can see it that doesn't, they're not necessarily emotionally tied into it. There are family things, there are work things, there are all kinds. We get to do this together.

And God wants us to enjoy our lives. He wants us to make the most of it rather than the least. I'm going to pray in just a moment, but the book of Ecclesiastes, which I hope you'll read, it closes with this. He goes, whatever you do, do well. For when you go to the grave, there'll be no more work or planning or knowledge or wisdom. We have a short shelf life here. We need to make the absolute most of it. God's given us opportunities. He wants us to use them well, and when we do, we will see him working. in our life and the lives around us. And it's absolutely worth it.

Let's pray. God, so many times we miss the opportunities that are right in front of us. Those of us that know you, we know that you've placed us here. And in all the circumstances that we're in, we have an opportunity to show others something about your love and your truth and your kindness and your mercy and your grace. Help us to choose to do it, not worry about how others treat us. Help us to treat them in the way you've treated us. And for anyone here that doesn't yet know you, God, I pray that there'll be something that they pick up from this that lets them know that there's this big God that has placed us here. He has really good purposes for us. When we align our life with you, He changes everything.