
Nothing Better

When everything else is stripped away, five simple gifts remain. Ecclesiastes says there is nothing better than to feast with friends, do some good, enjoy your partner, share your stuff, and opt for joy.

“He has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.”

ECCLESIASTES 3:11

Life does not come with guarantees. We labor and build, love and lose, hope and hurt, and the world stays mysterious. The harder we try to master it, the more it slips through our hands. Ecclesiastes has a word for

that: *hevel*, a breath, steam off a cup on a cold morning. And God set eternity in us anyway, a hunger for what we can sense but never reach.

Three Longings

Each carries a fear.

THE INFINITE

Possibility

The longing to reach past what you know, toward the next horizon. The teenager driving with the windows down on a summer night.

Its fear: getting stuck.

ECCLESIASTES 1:8

THE INDELIBLE

Permanence

The longing for what lasts: to build something that outlives you, to be loved in a way that does not end. The old man standing a long time at his wife’s grave.

Its fear: loss, and being forgotten.

ECCLESIASTES 2:16

THE IDEAL

Perfection

The longing to close the gap between what is and what should be. The architect holding her drawing up against the finished building.

Its fear: falling short.

ECCLESIASTES 7:20

Five Gifts

Four times Ecclesiastes stops and says there is nothing better, and a fifth time it tells you plainly what to do. Five simple, human ways to taste eternity in time: to feast with friends, do some good, enjoy your partner, share your stuff, and opt for joy.

I **Feast with Friends** ECCLESIASTES 9:7

Presence matters more than polish, and soup will do. Set the table anyway. Every feast is a protest against despair.

II **Do Some Good** ECCLESIASTES 9:10

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might. Your work joins God in what he is still making, and the joy is in the doing.

III **Enjoy Your Partner** ECCLESIASTES 9:9

The verb is *enjoy*, the word you would use about a good meal. You cannot enjoy someone you no longer notice. Ask one question tonight that is not about logistics.

IV **Share Your Stuff** ECCLESIASTES 5:19

Everything you own will one day belong to someone else. That can make you afraid, or it can set you free. Open the good bottle.

V **Opt for Joy** ECCLESIASTES 8:15

In whatever you’re facing, choose joy, not because life is easy, but because it is short. Joy and sorrow can come in the same minute: a laugh at a memory, then tears for the person in it. Judge the direction by the decade, not the day.

Feast. Work. Love. Give. Rejoice.

NOTHINGBETTER.COM

Why So Serious?

Ten forces that quietly ruin our ability to play.

So why do adults lose the ability to play? Why does lightness feel irresponsible? Why does delight feel unsafe? Here are ten forces that quietly ruin the capacity for it. Most people find two or three of these running their week. See which are yours.

1 Seriousness

There is a seriousness that honors responsibility, and a seriousness that treats every hour as a problem to solve and never a gift to receive. You assume everything depends on you. That is not maturity. It is fear dressed up as wisdom.

2 Discontentment

Discontentment stares at what is missing; play sees what is present. If tomorrow always matters more than today, you never enter the moment you were actually given. Not the ideal one. This one.

3 Resentment

Resentment, bitterness and unresolved hurt keep joy from moving. You cannot laugh freely with someone you are secretly billing. Forgiveness is what gets joy moving again, and play with it.

4 Time

The clock is not the enemy; plenty of games are played against one. The problem is rarely a shortage of time. It's letting the clock run you: once life is counted in units, it gets easier to manage and harder to enjoy.

5 Religion

Pleasure feels suspicious, rest feels lazy, delight feels unserious, so we shrink our lives in the name of holiness. But Ecclesiastes says, "I commend joy" (Ecclesiastes 8:15). A religion that cannot play is not deep. It is wounded.

6 Family

Some grew up where play was rare and affection thin. Others grew up in a home so chaotic that a child never felt settled. Both can make play feel unsafe. But the home you grew up in doesn't have the last word. You can still learn to play.

7 Self-Protection

Time alone is good. The trouble is pulling away to stay safe from every risk and hard relationship. It looks like prudence. Staying and working through it is often where the deeper joy is.

8 Languishing

Not a meltdown. Just meh. Work is fine, home is fine, you are fine, and nothing lands. Getting going is like push-starting an old car, and the small gifts are the push: a meal, a task done well, one act of generosity.

9 Atrophy

The longer you go without playing, the more out of shape you get for it. The way back is to start playing again. A real laugh. A pointless game. An unproductive hour with someone you love.

10 Control

The belief that if you plan better and hold tighter, life will finally cooperate. It is the death of play. You cannot enter a moment you require certainty about.

Nos. 1 to 4 after Kevin Gushiken, *A Theology of Play*.

Play begins where control ends.

Not in despair, but in trust. May your hands stay open, your heart stay soft, and your step stay light.

NOTHINGBETTER.COM

NOTHING BETTER

The Practices

The practices here are examples. Adopt them as they stand, then adapt: cross out what does not hold and write in what does.

Keep it small. One practice per gift is enough to begin.

EACH DAY, BEFORE THE FIVE

You cannot receive what you cannot see. Two minutes, morning or evening. Four questions, one per lens.

	DAILY	WEEKLY	SEASONAL	YOURS
1 Feast with Friends <i>Meaning is shared at the table.</i>	Eat one meal at the table, not at a desk, with your phone in another room.	A regular meal with friends, the same night each week, or Saturday breakfast with the kids.	Host one bigger gathering: a birthday, a holiday, the first cookout of summer.	_____
2 Do Some Good <i>Burn your calories for good.</i>	Finish one task all the way, then stop work at a set hour.	Do something for someone who can't pay you back.	Take on one project for your house or your neighborhood.	_____
3 Enjoy Your Partner* <i>Take joy in the person you chose and the life you are building together.</i>	Ask something real and listen to the whole answer. A hand on the shoulder, just because.	An evening or a walk together with no phones and no planning talk.	Plan something together: a trip, a new tradition, a project around the house.	_____
4 Share Your Stuff <i>Use what you have for others' good.</i>	Use something good you've been saving: the good dishes, the good coffee.	Give something: an hour, a skill, an introduction, a meal, money.	Give away what hasn't been used in a year.	_____
5 Opt for Joy <i>In whatever you're facing, choose joy.</i>	Pick the choice with more joy in it. Before bed, remember one good thing from the day.	A walk without your phone, or a game with someone, just for fun.	Look back at the season. What crowded out joy? Choose one small thing to do differently.	_____

EACH WEEK

Five gifts, five fingers. Count them on one hand and ask what you already have in hand. Then ask which one was missing this week, and make room for it next week.

WHEN IT BREAKS

It will. Find the one gift still within reach, and keep that one until the others come back. This is not the rule failing. This is what it was written for.

* Not married? This gift is still yours. Marriage is a friendship unlike any other, but it is not the only one, and friendship is open to everyone.

Feast. Work. Love. Give. Rejoice.

NOTHINGBETTER.COM