

I used to have a bible – a Jesus Freaks copy of the NIV. It has a textured cover – I called it my furry bible. Whenever I read it at Nudge or Scripture classes, I called it my furry bible and every time some kids would ask to feel it. It's not that they didn't believe me – it's that they wanted to experience it too. They wanted to feel it. They didn't especially care why it felt like that – they're not after answers, simply experience.

The same can be said of entire generations – The quintessential standard for excellence among people is 'Did it move me?' Passion responds to emotional experiences. If a concert moves you, but church doesn't, then the concert wins. We all come to church to feel something, to be moved, to feel God - because personal experience is our ultimate test of test. Theologically speaking, this is wrong. Worship is for the benefit of God, not us. But listen to this description of church, and see if it resonates –

The hymn done and the bell rung, the liturgy was open to the group. Soon after the opening of the ceremony she offered us a most wonderful gift: she sang "Amazing Grace" for us. A grace indeed felt! The spirit was coming down, resting upon my shoulder as her words filled the room and our hearts. Indeed it was an amazing grace, that grace that passes all understanding. I was moved; I was in communion with everyone else in the room. It was as if, at that moment, all barriers had come down, all suffering had ended, all pain had been relieved, all joys had been known. I forgave the offences I had suffered and was forgiven for my sins. I felt delivered from the agony of guilt. I felt free. I was healed. I was strengthened. I was redeemed.

As the sacrament slowly wore off, we quieted down a bit. We all respected each other's space, each other's words, each other's silences. We all took turns sharing something powerful with the group and I believe we all came out of the experience enriched. And surprised too. How easy it is to feel free in such a safe setting. MDMA helps tremendously, of course.

MDMA stands for methylenedioxymethamphetamine – ecstasy. That passage was one man's account of the Harvard Agape – a service held at Harvard University before which students take the drug ecstasy, in search of a deeper experience of God.

You see, young people are constantly seeking to feel more. Martin Robinson describes the experience we long for as “where the membrane between this world and a reality beyond is especially thin, where a transcendent reality impinges on the imminent.” Basically, we want an experience greater than our present reality, and we want it now. We'll do whatever it takes if we can be assured of that experience.



Now, let's be clear – 'being moved' is God's work, not ours. God condescends to address us where we are. It requires us to have a willing vulnerability, and a susceptibility to holy heat. Transcendent practices, which are the things we try to feel this nearness to God, seek to intensify our sense of calling and identity in God.

These practices may be acts of reaching out to others, or immersing ourselves in Christian community and its celebrations. Whatever direction we head, we are undertaking a spiritual pilgrimage to these liminal spaces.

Worship, of course, is the church's premier form of pilgrimage, interrupting with holy punctuations. By changing the habits of daily life, we become more alert to the mystery and reality of God amongst us. God's presence during worship - even 'ordinary worship when the music sounds bad' is never in question. What is in question is our ability to perceive God's presence.

Pilgrimages are never undertaken for the sake of the journey itself. Pilgrims travel with a destination in mind – union with God, symbolized by a liminal experience of 'arriving' at a sacred spot. In medieval Europe, the pilgrim (which means stranger) was removed from normal life, and everything they encountered was strange and dangerous – work, location, food, relationships.

It was clear to the people back then, as I reckon it is still clear today, that if you seek a richer, deeper, transcendent experience of God, then something has to change. We need to open our lives to new experiences, humbling ourselves to the Spirit of God and waiting. It's like that old joke – the first sign of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting something different.

I want to stop here briefly to play you a song. Some of you may be familiar with it, but I invite you to enjoy it again. It speaks of our desire to find God, and it also acts as a nice segue into the end of my message up here.

"Hide & Seek w/ God" (find the link @ www.bradon2u.wordpress.com)

Now, God may never actually say 'suck it in your face,' but I assure you, God can handle Hamish & Andy.

I want to finish by exploring the concept of play, and how we can engage with play as we seek to experience God in our reality. Of all our children learnings, we are most faithful to the practice of play. We imagine, we dream, we pretend, we engage, we are overtaken. Play requires surrender, and self-abandonment.



Now, the church has done its best to quash the play out of us. When children play in services, people hush them. We take the children out during the boring parts so they won't get bored and misbehave. It's only when they've learnt not to play (ie, grown up) that we let them come back to "worship."

But playful worship tunes our perceptual skills to God's movement, by engaging with God's give-and-take with our world (through candles, oils, water, wine, fire and ashes), by moving people physically (clapping, dancing or bowing), and by participating in sacraments that dramatically re-enact Christ's life, death and resurrection. All these acts of worship intensify the perception of God's presence in the present while at the same time releasing young people from needing to "feel God" emotionally in order to have a spiritually significant experience.

Despite the seriousness with which we take our faith, our faith that we'd die for, there's no imitation of Christ, our central calling, no Christian identity, without play. The bible tells us, in Proverbs 27, that even God plays. The Trinitarian God danced through creation. God made creation to enjoy it, and made us to enjoy God. Only when we stop using God as a helper in our time of need, a stop-gap and a problem solver, can we really worship playfully. We also need to allow God to play in us. Sometimes that simply means stopping, and practicing Sabbath.

A Rabbi once said, it is good to observe the 24 hours of the Sabbath; but if your life is too busy, then you are encouraged to observe the 12 hours of Sabbath; but if your life is too busy, then observe 6 hours of Sabbath time; but if your life is too busy, then observe 1 hour of Sabbath; and if you can't observe even 1 hour of Sabbath, then at least want to. Sabbath offers both a rest from commerce and worry, and a rest for creation and creativity.

I want to leave you with a quote from Martin Luther – "If you could understand a single grain of wheat, you would die of wonder." The God we seek to experience and feel is an awesome and amazing God. We must approach God, therefore, with a sense of awe and amazement. Amen

