

MORE THAN PLAY

If you visit Jabulane Christian Academy at Bethesda Outreach, it is normal to hear children's voices and see them playing on our property with big smiles on their faces. If they are not playing on the jungle gym, then they are throwing a netball or playing soccer so that you just see big clouds of dust fill the air. Our kids love to play! Playing comes naturally to children. Playing comes naturally to all of us. If we are honest, and if our bodies were able, most of us would still choose to run around, run after something, jump over stuff, kick a ball, throw something or even someone!

You might not be aware of it but the Bible does speak about play and in the article from Desiring God (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/holy-play>), Erik Thoennes writes that:

"The most stirring images of play in the Bible occur in attempts to express the joy and freedom experienced in the coming kingdom of God. One of the most vivid of these images appears in Zechariah 8:5: 'The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.' God gives his people a beautiful scene of the eschaton to look forward to children playing with uninhibited, unhindered freedom. Isaiah 11:8-9 offers a similar picture of the freedom to be found in the heavenly city. Fearless, childlike play, no longer inhibited by the effects of sin and the curse, is a key metaphor of Christ's kingdom. Similar images of playful celebration and merrymaking abound in other prophetic glimpses of what the New Jerusalem brings (for example, Jeremiah 30:18-19; 31:4, 13-14)."



We want our school children to play! Erik Thoennes also writes that, "Play is a fun, imaginative, non-compulsory, non-utilitarian activity filled with creative spontaneity and humor, which gives perspective, diversion, and rest from the necessary work of daily life." Spend time with children and you will play! If you think you are too old to play, then wait until you have grandchildren and you will play like never before. We all play, and when you add in some universal rules and competition to play, then you have what we know as sport, which many people love. Some love sports a little too much! However, just because some people love it too much does not mean that sport itself is evil.

Marty Dittmar, the sports chaplain for Purdue University, has brought many college sports men and women to visit Bethesda for short-term mission trips. Over the years, our school children have met amazing servant-hearted sportsmen and women. We even had someone visit Jabulane Christian Academy who is now playing in the National Football League (NFL). No, my South African friends, that is not the same as soccer! We have had local South African soccer stars visit JCA and share their stories on career day. These are sports stars who not only love sport, but they love Jesus more than their sport. I have often wondered...will a future sports star arise from our midst? Maybe one with a story of how they were shown the love of God through sportspeople who came to visit Jabulane Christian Academy?

Every year we raise money for our Christmas project. This year's project is close to my own heart and one that I believe will bring such joy to our children. Bethesda is raising money for a multi-purpose sports field for Jabulane Christian Academy. The field that we have been researching can be used for field hockey, soccer, tennis, netball, basketball and other games. If we can raise funds for this project, a few children's Christmas stockings will be overflowing all at once! That is how much they love sports and would love playing on this new field. Building a multi-purpose sports field is important in the growth and development of our school, especially if we want to compete with what other private schools in our area are offering. Having the right sports facilities will also allow us to host other schools for sports events.

A good question: "Is it worth investing in a sports field?" Our answer is a resounding "Yes!" Yes, for the growth of our school, but also for when our children are not studying as many are playing and doing life together through sport. Why is sport so important to us? Sport is one of those good things that God has given to us that we can easily turn into an idolatrous thing. When our hearts are not making too much of sport and turning it into an idol, it is a good gift from God for us to enjoy. We enjoy sport, but in it, we also reflect God as His image-bearers in our creativity, design, order and so much more. One author once said that even our good desire for victory when we play sports competitively reflects something of our God who is victorious.

In the book, *The Huddle*, written by Shawn Brower, he says that sport can help with dedication, develop potential, industriousness, physical condition, self-control, team spirit, and teamwork. What stood out for me was how Brower said that sport is a microcosm of the macrocosm of life. There are life lessons that you learn on the sports field that in some way prepares you for what you will face in life. I agree with him; and we do not want to forget to mention the many gospel opportunities we have on and off the sports field. When we face pressure on the field, then what is in our hearts often comes out and that gives coaches, parents and teachers an opportunity to help shepherd our children's hearts.



We must remember, as Jeremy R Treat says in the article, *More than a Game: A Theology of Sport*, "Sports can be a platform for evangelism and a classroom for morality, but they are first and foremost a playground for receiving and enjoying the goodness of the Creator." When we play, we delight in the God who made us not only to work, but also to play and we honor Him in all we do!

Our Bethesda children and the many children in JCA that come from our community have stories of brokenness with hope found in Christ. Our desire is for them to see the real hero, Jesus, who steps into their brokenness to save them and bring life and hope and healing. Another reason we want our children to play is that we want our children to have fun and to see that in the brokenness and hardship of this world, there are hopes and joys that God gives and allows us to enjoy. Even after our salvation, this life is not without hardships and trouble, but we have hope in it. I love how Erik Thoennes points out the following:

"The Christian worldview recognizes the relentless difficulty of life in our cursed world, but it also recognizes that the world is being redeemed by the one who created and cursed it. So we have

hope, and play, in the midst of our brokenness. 'He suffered that we may laugh again. . . . In the cross of Christ God is taking man dead-seriously so that he may open up for him the happy freedom of Easter.' Without hope, play becomes merely a diversion from life's troubles rather than a hopeful expression of the freedom to come in the eschaton. When play is an end in itself, it can become a frivolous idol that keeps us from dealing with the human predicament. When play is grounded in the hope of the gospel, it can become one of life's greatest and most encouraging pleasures."

We can all remember that joy as the bell rang for break when and we could go out to play after sitting through a gruelling maths class! I'm sure you remember the joy and hope in looking forward to the soccer game after school. These are little glimpses and reminders of the true hope we have as believers in a broken world with the hope that it will one day be fully restored.

We would love to have you join us as we raise funds to build a multi-purpose sports field to encourage play and sport at Jabulane Christian Academy!

Bethesda Outreach
Christmas Project

Goal: \$150,000 / R2.2M

MULTI-SPORTS FIELD

Bethesda
OUTREACH

Training minds and bodies for Christ

JABULANE CHRISTIAN
ACADEMY
Guiding Students in the Discovery of God's Truth