



CREATOR

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RAVEN'S PLAY

“...the joy of the LORD is your strength”
(Nehemiah 8:10 b).

Nothing in nature “just happens” on its own. *Christ Jesus is in control of everything at all times*, “for God is the King of all the earth” (Psalm 47:7 a).¹ When ravens play with one another (and oh, yes, ravens do play!), they proclaim something about their Creator’s character. But what is it about Jesus they reveal?

The same is true of quarreling crows. When two crows noisily squabble over a french fry dropped on a sidewalk by a three-year-old child, they tell us something about *God and ourselves*. In this case, the fight over forgotten fast food mirrors the *sin* of mankind and demonstrates the *patience* of our Creator in the face of bickering birds. (He could easily destroy the crows for being so foolish to mimic our sin, couldn’t He?)

Let’s not dwell on why animals fight. Rather, let’s explore why animals, like ravens, play (that sounds like more fun anyway). When animals romp and rollick they reveal a unique aspect of Christ’s personality, because He made them.²

Editor’s Note: We now join an imaginary

conversation between two birds at the zoo: a cranky hornbill and a gregarious raven.

Hornbill: “You’re just saying that because you want to justify your childish behavior . . . Would you PLEASE stop poking me with that stick!”

Editor’s Note: The raven promptly drops the stick he is holding in his mouth.

Raven: “Oh, you never want to have any fun!”

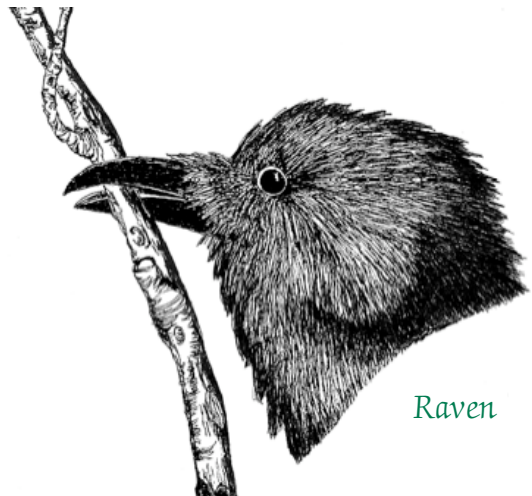
Hornbill: “Fun?! When I lived in the wild, monkeys *chased* us hornbills. Do you call that fun?”

Raven: “Well, it sounds like the monkeys were enjoying themselves.”

Hornbill: “Cute! But I don’t think our Creator put us here on Earth to waste time . . . we have nests to build and food to gather.”

Raven: “Yes, He does want us to work hard because He is a God Who works night and day. But He also wants us to express His joy.”

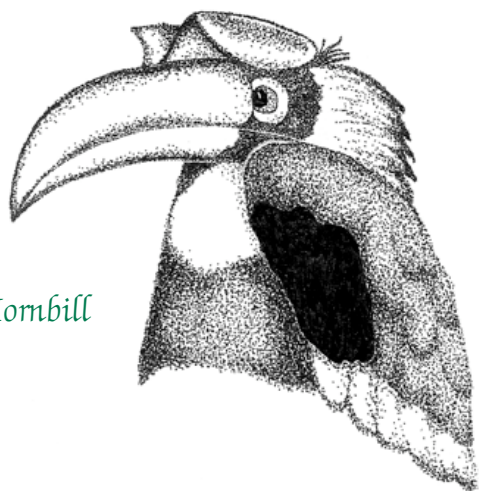
Hornbill: “You need to face facts, Raven. Very



Raven

¹ In other words, Jesus is *absolutely sovereign* (pronounced SAHV - rin).

² God’s character is reflected in creation (Romans 1:20). This does not mean that creation is God or God is creation as some might believe. A painter is not equal to his painting. God and His creation are utterly separate from one another, but God’s personality does show up in the things He has created.



Hornbill

few animals play. You ravens are unusual in that regard. You're . . . you're just a bunch of silly birds!"

Raven: "Flock."

Hornbill: "Huh?"

Raven: "We're a *flock* of silly birds—you need to work on your vocabulary."

Hornbill: "See, see, there you go again, being silly."

Raven: "I don't deny that we ravens are very playful. Jesus made us that way. But we're hardly alone. Most mammals and birds like to 'kick up their heels.' I hate to say it, my friend, but you're the exception, not the rule."

Hornbill: "Oh, really?! Name some other animals that play then."

Raven: "OK, where do I start? The *Tasmanian devil* has been observed on more than one occasion using a tree or hollow log to play hide-and-seek with its brothers and sisters. The *mongoose* also enjoys chasing and hiding from its own kind."

Hornbill: "That's mammals for you!"

Raven: "It's not just mammals. Jesus gave a type of *parrot* in New Zealand the same desire to play hide-and-seek. And *peacocks* like playing tag with one another.

"*Marmosets* and *tamarins* are monkeys that also enjoy playing tag. So do *Roe deer*. It's not uncommon for young deer to run around early in the morning just as the sun begins to rise. They

love to chase each other through trees at break-neck speeds."

Hornbill: "Well, I suppose the Creator wants young animals to *exercise* so that they develop their lungs and their legs."

Raven: "Yes, that's true because the joy of the Lord is also our strength! Jesus designed *creative ways* for us to build our strength so that we can survive in the wild. If there's no work to be done, young *beavers* frequently frolic in the water with one another, rolling and somersaulting as they go. I'm certain this improves their swimming skills.

Wolf pups are known to chase and ambush each other—this may prepare them for hunting as adults. By the way, the wolf, not the raven, holds the world record for play. Young wolves were once observed chasing each other and roughhousing for five hours nonstop! Anyway, juvenile *weasels* and *mink* regularly practice stalking one another—just for fun—they hone their hunting skills that way."

Hornbill: "Well, I'll concede that young animals do play, but we adults have more important things to do!"

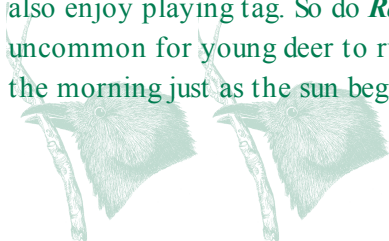
Raven: "But immature animals are not the only ones who play, Hornbill. *Full-grown tigers* enjoy swimming and splashing around in the water. Many adult animals run and gallup to stay strong and nimble. I honestly think, however, that most of God's creatures play simply because they're glad to be alive!"

Hornbill: "Oh, I find that hard to believe!"

Raven: "No, really! Some animals play intensely just after escaping danger. It's called 'play of relief.' And how do you explain the fact that young *goats* have been observed 'dancing' at the sight of a butterfly?"

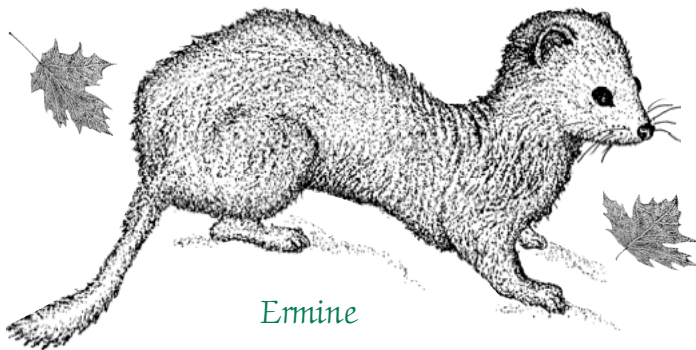
Hornbill: "Umm...well..."

Raven: "There are *monkeys* that carry rocks up a tree, fling them to the ground, only to retrieve the stones and take them up the tree again. What does that accomplish for the monkeys? The only 'purpose' seems to be that they *enjoy* dropping



rocks from a tree! **Gorilla** fathers and **chimpanzee** mothers like to tickle their children. What survival skill does that teach the kids—BEWARE OF THE HIDEOUS TICKLE MONSTER?!

“A captive **dolphin** enjoys balancing objects on its nose, and wild dolphins frequently ride the waves created by the bow of a fast-moving ship. Like those human children staring at us right now, **ermine**—a type of weasel—have been observed leaping into piles of leaves, then rolling around in them. In winter, **river otters** climb up the sides of a stream for the sole purpose of sliding down its



snowy banks. It all sounds like fun to me!

“There’s more: **Sea lions** often grab long pieces of kelp in their mouths and then chase each other. Young **horses** frequently jump straight up into the air for no apparent reason—so do many other animals. Hornbill, I don’t want to sound sarcastic, but why would these animals do that? Does Jesus expect these creatures to sprout wings and fly?”

Editor’s note: The hornbill appears somewhat embarrassed and has nothing to say.

Raven: “They’re leaping for joy, Hornbill, they’re leaping for the joy of the Lord!”

“Let me run another thought by you. Jesus even allows some animals to have fun with other species. We **ravens** especially like to play pranks on **wolves**. We have nothing against wolves—we just enjoy pestering them!”

Hornbill: “I’m certain it’s not common for

animals to ‘play’ with other species.”

Raven: “Well, I’m not sure you’re right about that. Like you said, **monkeys** enjoy running after you **hornbills** because they seem to get a kick out of scaring you. The whole idea kind of reminds me of **dogs** chasing **pigeons** in the park.”

Hornbill: “Oh, great, now you think of me as a pigeon!”

Raven: “You need to take yourself less seriously, Hornbill, and take God a lot more seriously!”

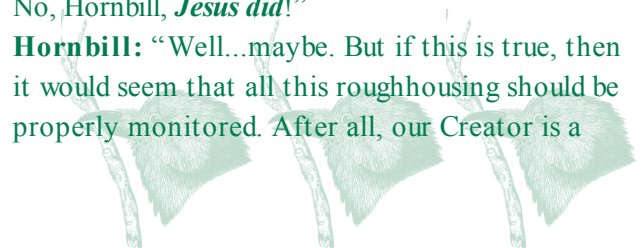
Editor’s Note: There’s silence as Hornbill thinks. The raven picks up the stick again and gently pokes the hornbill. He then drops the stick.

Raven: “**Baboons** have been observed playing with at least five other species of animals: **impalas**, **bushbuck**, **gelada**, **chimpanzee**, and **vervet monkeys**. **Blackbuck antelope** enjoy teasing birds, and...”

Hornbill: “OK, OK, you’ve made your point! But you can’t honestly compare the play of animals to the activities of those human children, who, by the way, are still staring at us—I wish they would stop doing that!”

Raven: “Relax, Hornbill, they look like sweet kids—they’re just curious! And it’s true that human children are made in the image of God and are not animals. But their Lord is our Lord and His joy is our joy—it permeates throughout life! Consider **Columbian ground squirrels**—when they have free time, they frequently ‘leap frog’ over one another, as do badgers; **badgers** also engage in ‘tug-of-war’ games; **jackals** enjoy ‘blind man’s bluff’; **spotted hyenas** use sticks to play ‘keep-away,’ as do we ravens; and **red deer** have been seen climbing small hills and playing ‘king-of-the-mountain,’ so have **wolves**. Who do you think taught us these games—games also played by human children? Surely people didn’t teach us?! No, Hornbill, **Jesus did!**”

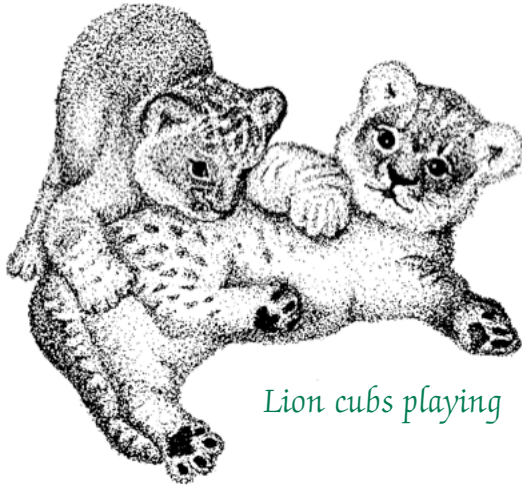
Hornbill: “Well...maybe. But if this is true, then it would seem that all this roughhousing should be properly monitored. After all, our Creator is a



God of Order!”

Raven: “Oh, God monitors it all right! In many animal families, He has Mom and Dad, or older Brother and Sister, oversee the activities of the youngest members of the clan. Adult animals, for instance, often prevent the youngsters from goofing around when danger is nearby. It’s as if the adults are ‘saying’ to their children, ‘Now is not the time for fun!’ And if lion cubs get too rough with one another, Mom often intervenes.

“When two *elephants* trunk-wrestle, Jesus expects the stronger elephant to be careful with his weaker playmate. The stronger elephant matches his strength to whomever he is wrestling with. Isn’t that amazing?! ISN’T JESUS

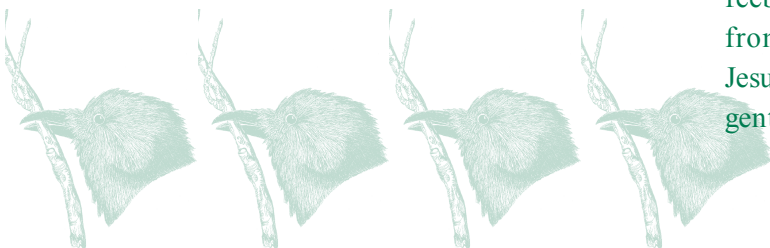


Lion cubs playing

AMAZING?!

“So, you see, Hornbill, everything is under Christ’s control! And we playful animals are simply expressing His joy as Creator!”

The hills are clothed with gladness...they shout for joy and sing (Psalm 65:12 b, 13 b).



GOD’S SWEETNESS

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him (Psalm 34:8 NKJV)!

Editor’s Note: Professor Seismo³ and his grandchildren are visiting the zoo today. They go there often, but today is extra special because their first stop is the zoo nursery. They want to see what baby animals have been born recently.

Kelsey: “Ooo, puppies!”

Professor Seismo: “Those are baby wolves, Kelsey.”

Kelsey: “Ooo, looky, what’s those, Gampa?”

Professor Seismo: “They’re baby raccoons! Say, did you kids know that baby raccoons usually live high in a tree? Sometimes they fall *two stories* from their home to the ground. It’s not really a problem though, because Mom simply carries her babies back up to the family den.”

Rick: “Don’t the babies get hurt, Grandpa?”

Professor Seismo: “No, because Jesus made their bones and bodies very soft!”



Baby crocodile hatching

Josh: “What’s in this tank, Grampa—alligators?”

Professor Seismo: “No, Josh, they’re baby crocodiles. Believe it or not, crocodiles are quite feeble as babies. When they’re ready to hatch from their eggs, they cry out to God for help. Jesus sends the mother crocodile to the nest to gently break open their eggs, using her teeth. The

baby crocodiles then climb into her mouth for a ride down to the river. Once in the water, they stay close to Mom. If danger appears, the babies again rush into Mom's mouth for safety.

"Many baby animals need their parents to be near them at all times. The Lord Jesus uses the mother manatee,⁴ for instance, to keep the baby manatee from drowning after it's born."

Rick: "What's a manatee, Grandpa Seismo?"

Professor Seismo: "A manatee is a large mammal that lives in water. Kind of like a walrus without tusks. But it's not a fish so it can't breathe underwater—it must come to the surface to get air. The problem is that the newborn manatee doesn't know how! So Jesus has Mom gingerly lift her baby to the surface

every
three
or four

minutes. She continues to do this until it learns how to surface on its own, which may take six or seven days. I bet she doesn't get much sleep that first week after her baby is born!"

Editor's Note: Professor Seismo and the kids finish visiting the nursery, and decide to check out the zoo's bird exhibits. They pause in front of the *hornbill* habitat located next to the *raven* enclosure. Josh looks up.

Josh: "Hey, Grampa, it almost looks like those two birds are talking to each other!"

Professor Seismo: "Hmm, it does at that!"

⁴ Another name for a manatee is **sea cow**. A manatee is very similar to a **dugong** which is also known as a sea cow.

Editor's Note: Rick is still thinking about the animals at the nursery.

Rick: "Grandpa, why are baby animals so cute?"

Professor Seismo: "Oh, there are lots of reasons, I suppose. They're cute because they have really soft fur or feathers; oftentimes Jesus 'paints' baby animals in pretty colors and stripes; most young creatures have more delicate features than their parents—their noses, ears, and legs are usually smaller or thinner; babies frequently give out helpless cries; and they're often curious and playful. But the main reason I think baby animals are so sweet is that they helplessly depend on Jesus and they reflect His sweetness."

Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God...? Job 38:41

Josh: "Whaddaya mean, Grampa?"

Professor Seismo: "Those who love Jesus know that He is sweet because He is *stronger than anyone*. But He was willing to become *weak* like us! And His tenderness is seen in the baby animals He created."

Rick: "I'm not weak, Grandpa—see my muscles!"

Professor Seismo: "You have very strong muscles, Rick. But compared to God even the strongest man in the world is very weak!"

Kelsey: "Ohhh!"

Professor Seismo: "Jesus is the King of all creation and no one is stronger than He is. But He made Himself weak like us. Jesus, the most powerful person in the universe, humbled Himself to become poor for our sake."⁵

Rick: "Why'd He do that, Grandpa?"

Professor Seismo: "So He could die for our sins! Jesus is sweet because He showed us the way to escape from all the bad things we do. Jesus is sweet because He willingly became weak and suffered for our sins.⁶ He died on a cross because He loves us a lot!"

⁵ Read 2 Corinthians 8:9.

⁶ Read 2 Corinthians 13:4.

Josh: “Then why are baby animals so sweet, Grampa Seismo?”

Professor Seismo: “How could our super-powerful God make something so gentle, so helpless, so innocent-looking, if He wasn’t able to understand what it means to be weak—weak like the people and animals He created?”

“How could Jesus, Who is God, save us from our sins unless He was willing to give up everything Himself and show us the way?”⁷ He’s sweet because, though He’s God, He was not afraid to reach down to us here on Earth and get hurt for our sake.”

Rick: “Oh, kinda like when you bend down and pick us up, Grandpa? Sometimes you hurt your back, but you always have a smile on your face!”

Professor Seismo: “Well, in a very small way, Rick, I suppose you’re right. Only, Jesus didn’t just hurt His back, He died for us. And He was glad to do it! The Bible says that “for the joy set before Him [Jesus] endured the cross.”⁸ You see kids, *sweetness is the joy of God’s strength revealed in the things that are humble and weak.*⁹ That’s why baby animals give us a glimpse into the sweet and tender heart of our Creator. Jesus is able to make cute, helpless animals because He is the **God of Grace**. With His great Father’s approval, Jesus became weak for us and suffered the punishment we should have received—this is grace. That’s why He’s so sweet! *When weakness joyfully and humbly meets greatness, sweetness will be the result.* When we kneel before God we become sweet to His eyes and we experience the sweetness of Jesus!”

“The whines and whimpers of baby animals are actually cries to Jesus for help. God cares for them through their mothers and fathers. And that’s why baby animals are sweet—weakness and greatness come together—they are weak, but the great hand of Jesus gives them life!”

Rick: “Ya, I guess we understand now.”

Editor’s Note: Do *you* understand? Do you understand that there is strength in humility and this is where true joy originates? The only way to know the joy of God is to recognize that you are

weak in your sins. And it is only through the humility AND strength that Jesus showed on the cross, in dying for your sins, that you can be forgiven your sins? If you are willing to humbly repent and, by God’s strength, commit yourself to become like Jesus, then you will know the sweetness of salvation (please read Matthew 18:1-4)! Let me encourage you, if you have never confessed your sins before God, do it now! If you desire to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ this day, you may choose to use the following prayer to lay your heart before the Lord.

Dear Father, I recognize that I have lived my life independently of You and You consider this sin. Please forgive me through Your Son, Jesus Christ—through His death on the cross. Jesus, please come into my heart right now. I embrace You as my God and my Savior. I receive Your gift of eternal life. Show me how to live the way You want me to live. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I pray, Amen.

“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy,
because great is your reward in heaven.”
Luke 6:23 a



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