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Andrews Speaks: Learning to play

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▲ Jay Brand, professor of Leadership and Higher Education, presents for Andrews Speaks, the podcast of Andrews University.

Andrews Speaks: Learning to play

As Andrews University transitioned to remote learning and working in response to COVID-19, Season Two of the Andrews University podcast, Andrews Speaks, was launched. The podcast explored living and learning in a time of social distancing and included the topics of change, health, science and ethics.

The final topic for the season was creativity. One of the presenters, Jay Brand, professor of Leadership and Higher Education, spoke on the power of play and the concepts of divergent thinking and deep empathy.

He explained that convergent thinking is used on a day-to-day basis to balance the checkbook or to read a challenging book — most of life is taken up with convergent thinking. Divergent thinking, on the other

hand, encourages an individual to think in novel ways, in new directions, and to take fresh perspectives — diversity and variety are embraced through divergent thinking.

“In this regard, I am reminded of the Bible itself and what it tells us about the truth about our God and our Savior,” said Brand. “The very first sentence in the Bible, indeed the very first phrase, asserts that God exists, but in the same sentence it adds that God is the Creator. So, long before God is demonstrated to be the God of love, the Bible simply asserts that God is the Creator ... When we are being creative, we are reflecting an important element of the image of God in us.”

Brand went on to discuss how play encourages divergent thinking, noting that even thinking about things that do not exist

yet is a very important skill for creativity and innovation in an ever-changing world. When children play, their fresh perspectives make everything new. Play, as an unstructured, open-ended activity, increases the experience of awe and wonder.

“It would be wise for us to return to that perspective of wonder and gratitude,” he said. “Indeed, Jesus Himself instructed Nicodemus that ‘*You must be born again to see the Kingdom of God,*’ and He later reiterated that same truth by saying, ‘*Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will never see the kingdom of Heaven.*’ So, we must embrace fresh, new perspectives, and that requires divergent thinking. And play can help us all in our pursuit and enjoyment of divergent thinking.”

Brand also explained the concept of design thinking, a process that allows anyone to adopt a fresh perspective as reflected in other peoples’ experience. “Something called ‘deep empathy’ can be reached, whereby we uncover what might bring other people joy,” he said. “This is fundamentally a creative process because we understand the delight and the joy and the wonder of another human being.”

He concluded, “Indeed, deep empathy ... lays the foundation for unselfish service. That allows us to truly reflect the character of God. And *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.* Let’s all learn to play again.”

For more about Andrews Speaks, produced by Jeff Boyd in the Office of Research & Creative Scholarship, visit andrews.edu/podcasts. ■

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