

May 31, 2026

Paul Purdue preaching

On a dance floor, I usually feel self-conscious, awkward, and out of place. Maybe some of you can relate. I think growing up in a denomination officially opposed to dancing didn't help my confidence. One of our youth directors tracked the school dances and quizzed us about our plans, warning us dancing was a gateway sin, leading to all kinds of "sins of the flesh". I went to the sick hops anyway but felt guilty. However, when The Gap Band started playing "You Dropped A Bomb On Me" the funky beat lured even embarrassed wallflowers away from the concession stand. We tried our best to imitate the moves we had seen on MTV: step, step, spin, clap. It is hard to find your groove if you are worried about going to hell. On Sunday, my youth director would ask "Paul, did you go to the sock hop?" If I confessed "yes" he let out a long shame-triggering sigh and said, "I'm praying for you." Barf.

The purity culture burdened us with an unscientific and non-biblical understanding of our bodies. It defined us as "sinners" and described God as a judge. We did not hear how God created us in God's image, how "God is love" or "that nothing can separate us from God's love... (not even nakedness). (Genesis 1, 1 John 4, and Romans 8) This theology was anti-body, setting God against the human body, but Did not God create our bodies?

The longer I live the more thankful for my mom and dad. Mom and dad went square dancing and chaperoned a few sock-hops. My friends laughed but I was mortified when my mom and some teachers formed their own dance line. I am not sure why I never asked my parents about how they understood dancing.

According to a study by Minju Kim and Adena Schachner for the National Institute of Health, ninety percent of infants produced recognizable dance moves around their first birthday. Parents report that babies dance every day. With increasing motor development infants explore more dance moves and imitate gestures of their dancing caregivers by age before 18 months. Guess the percentage of parents who self-reported dancing and singing with their babies? 99%! Science shows us God deep wired us to move to the music. (NIH study "Origins of Dance" by Minju Kim and Adena Schachner) Reason says, God is pro-dancing, pro-walking, pro-leaping: God is body positive!

In church, we did not read Exodus 15, where *"the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing"* We skipped that for 2 reasons: female prophets and a pro-dancing

message. We did not hear sermons from 2 Samuel 6 where *“David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.”* Although we celebrated the healing in Acts 3 we did not talk about the physicality of praise, how the healed person, *“jumping to their feet, went walking and leaping and praising God”*. Communal dancing was a part of Jewish weddings, Jesus after turning water into wine, surely joined the conga line, (John 2) Isaiah 55 paints a picture of heaven, telling us how the Word of God will one day so liberate the world that, *“you shall go out in joy and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands”* Imagine heaven as a huge dance party, where we all know we are beloved and move with nothing but freedom, peace and joy. Our Creator created us and said that is very good, we are all different but we are all Piscacos, Rembrandts and O’Keeffe’s. (Genesis 1)

I love that image in Genesis Two of God as potter. God’s fingers move through the muddy clay shaping, spinning, sculpting the clay to form our ears, eyes, hair, and fingerprints. God slowly spins out strands of hair and sculpts eyes, ears and elbows. God then leans in, almost kissing us, breathes God’s very breath into our lungs and we awaken to life! Your lungs are filled with God’s breath. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Every breath, every word, every song, every time we catch our breath, every note we play begins with the breath of God... and returns to God’s eternal Hallelujah!

Praise the Lord!
 Praise God in the sanctuary!
 Praise God for all God’s mighty acts...
 Praise God with the blast of the ram’s horn!
 Praise God with lute and lyre!
 Praise God with drum and dance!
 Let every thing that has breath praise the Lord!
 Praise the Lord!

Scholars tell us that the psalmist Names every instrument used in the Temple. What is missing from the Psalms are the tunes for these songs, but the scholars tell us many of the Psalms had accompanying tunes and melodies, but more than this God created music.

When our son Caleb brought home the trumpet in 5th grade, he would practise a note or a line over and over, repeating each missed note, each malformed rift, hundreds times. He did not repeat the parts he could play well. No, as soon as Caleb mastered a

note or new technique, he moved on to the next challenge. That paid off with six years in All State Band and being a national collegiate Trumpet competition finalist. However, in fifth grade it meant a lot of loud unflattering sounds coming from the den. We were proud of Caleb, but not as proud as my mom. Granny Due's praise was so effusive Caleb sought the refuge of his room to rehearse without an audience. Undeterred, mom sat outside Caleb's door listening for hours. When Caleb finished practising and stepped out of his room mom clapped as if Caleb was stepping out onto the Schermerhorn stage. As a middle schooler Caleb was not always thrilled with mom's gracious praise, a lot of high school band, academic and sports culture is about earning praise. Maybe a month ago Caleb shared how he was once busking in NYC when a group of elderly Japanese women stood gently clapping after each song. He told us how he remembered Granny Due clapping with deep thankfulness to God.

I believe our Creator roots for us like that! God is watching us, rooting us on, noting our progress even amid our missteps and missed notes. Love is like that, it does not need to point out our missed notes, we usually know them without anyone piling on their judgement. Love liberates us to live into our belovedness. Love liberates us to be who God created us to be.

This week would you consider making eye contact with yourself in a mirror, or gently exhaling onto your hand and pausing to offer praise to God? Would you remember God has created you in the very image of God, beloved, beautiful, and worthy of praise? With all the judges and idols in the world it can be hard to thank God for creating us, but try to pause and remember God has given you your breath, your voice, your songs, and your music. God has lent you the breath that lets you wake up, walk, run and dance. This week, remember, God created you- flesh, bones, AND breath: you are a masterpiece. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.
John 4) amen.