

Growing Spiritually as an Elder

Faith Sharing In Small Groups

Using Games for Faith Sharing

Games are not necessarily just for fun. Sometimes by entering into an activity, we find out more about who we are and what our faith is about. These games are meant to facilitate the sharing of faith in a non-threatening manner. Enjoy!!

- 1) Use a ball and stand in a circle. Toss the ball from person to person. When someone catches the ball, they say one word or phrase on the chosen topic and then toss the ball to someone else. Monitor the circle to make sure everyone gets at least one turn. Topics could include:
 - One way that God has blessed me today
 - One person I hold in my heart in gratitude
 - One person/situation for which I hold great concern
 - One hope I have for this group or my congregation
 - Create your own.....

- 2) Make one side of the room absolute yes and the other absolute no. Make signs for each end of the room to remind people. Draw an imaginary line between the two points. Now ask a question, and then request that people line up on the line by how strongly they feel on the topic under discussion. This makes persons stand where they are on a continuum of opinion. Possible questions include:
 - I know what I want all of the time
 - I am comfortable sharing my faith in my family (or church or with strangers)
 - I believe that the death penalty is necessary
 - I am affected by racism seldom

After each movement along the line, ask follow up questions like:

- What in your life taught you to feel/believe/be this way?
- How do you feel about people on the other side of the room?
- What can you learn from people on the opposite side of the room?



- 3) Take a stand is a variation on the game in # 2. Draw an imaginary line down the center of the room. Make a statement, and ask people to then choose to stand on the side that means that they agree or the side of the line that means they disagree with it.

Statements you might pose are:

- Sharing my faith makes me uncomfortable.
- I look for people with which to share my faith.
- People who tell others about Jesus are fanatics.
- These statements make me feel guilty/sad/hopeful

Use similar follow up questions as in game #2.

- 4) Stand in a circle. Toss the ball around the circle making sure everyone gets it just one time. When you have had the ball raise your hand so people will not throw it to you. Now, as that people toss the ball in the same exact pattern again. Encourage them to go faster each time. Keep asking the question, “Can you all touch the ball in the exact same order any faster than this?” Be careful how you ask this question. Do not say “Can you toss the ball to each other any faster?”

Encourage problem solving as a group. They may reconfigure the circle so that they can just pass the ball around the circle quickly as an intermediary solution. The goal can be met in seconds by lining everyone up in order and having the first person run the ball across the palms of each person quickly. Do not give them the solution, keep prompting them to find it.

Unpack this game with questions like:

- How did it feel to know there were other solutions?
- How did you feel when you were told it wasn't fast enough?
- When did it dawn on you what the solution might be?
- Where did you get “stuck”?

- 5) List the fruits of the spirit from Galatians 5:22-23 on cards. Give each person in the group \$100.00 play money. Have them bid against each other for the gifts. This uncovers how much each one is worth. Unpack this experience by asking, How did you decide what you wanted the most? How did you compromise when competition took over? Did the group rebel during the game come to a sharing solution outside of the rules? This often happens with this game!!
- 6) Toss a ball of yarn around a circle until it is used up. When a person receives it, he/she wraps it around their waist and tosses it to the next person. When you



are done you are all connected by complex design. Ask questions like: Do you feel connected or trapped? What happens if you pull on your part of the design? What happens if someone steps out of the design? This is to teach about the connectedness of Christian community.

- 7) Form a circle holding hands. Tangle yourselves up into knots with your bodies without letting go of each other's hands. After you get tangled, try to move across the room without breaking the hand holding. Untangle yourselves without letting go of each other. A variation is to have one person outside the circle helping you to solve the dilemma of being stuck. That person, of course, is not in the original circle of knots. Follow up questions: How did it feel to try to move when you were so knotted? How is this like a church in conflict? How did it feel to have hands to hold in the stress? Did the hands comfort or confine your decision making?

- 8) This is an oldie but a goodie, but I've added a twist. You have 30 minutes to decide which of the following persons should be allowed into a shelter before a terrible storm that will kill everyone in your town who isn't sheltered. Your town is the only one that has Christian faith on the planet. If your town is totally wiped out, Christ's witness on earth will be gone until he comes again. Who in this group holds the greatest possibility to spread the good news to the ends of the earth from scratch? You can choose 5 of the 7 persons to go into the shelter. The possibilities are: a school teacher 40 years old, a doctor 50 years old, a pastor 45 years old, a student in the local Bible college 20 years old, a newly converted Christian 35 years old, a Church musician/dancer 30 years old, and a computer programmer 25 years old. All are practicing Christians. Or, you can make up your own cast of characters.

Give a time limit to figure it out. You can rank them individually and discuss your choices or try to come to an agreement as a group. You can also role play this game by each person taking on the personality of one of the characters and defending their right to be in the shelter. Follow up questions include: How did you decide who was most important for the shelter? What was lost by the ones that did not get to stay? How might these in the shelter spread the good news to the ends of the earth? A follow up activity is to role play the survivors making and action plan to spread the news of Christ.

- 9) Every Bible and hymnal on the planet has been destroyed within a one minute time span. You are with a group trying to remember everything about God you can to communicate to generations yet to come. Divide into six committees with the following assignments:
 - 1) Write down all God has done in history



- 2) Write down the laws of God
- 3) Write down the songs of faith
- 4) Write down stories about Jesus
- 5) Write down how to run a church
- 6) Write down what you hope for the future.

These categories roughly express the six kinds of scripture in the Bible: Histories, prophets, wisdom books, gospels, epistles, revelation/apocalyptic literature. Don't tell this until you have done the group tasks.

Faith Sharing Starters

These activities give people a place to start in sharing their faith with each other. Adapt them to your own setting. The only point to keep in mind is that persons should always be given the option of not participating in an exercise that hurts them. Discomfort may be part of growth, but hurt is another thing. Always give the option of pass to each person as an act of courtesy, for you may not know of something in their history that makes the sharing not helpful.

- 1) Using the Feel Wheel ask each person to identify the feeling they are having right now. This gets you into the room. You can read a passage of scripture or a quotation and use the Feel Wheel. In fact, you can use it before or after any activity in this whole group process. Make a big one and use markers, small tokens such as beans or candies, or stickers on it from session to session.

Make a small one for each meeting to use, or just use it once in a while for fun.

You can find the Feel Wheel online at:

www.disciplehomemissions.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Elders-Wheel.pdf

- 2) Ask each person to come to the next session with a poem, scripture, quotation, memory item, kitchen utensil, piece of clothing (think of your own category) that is important to them and/or signifies some thing about their faith. Share these stories in the room. It could also be bringing something that reminds them of the scripture text you are studying that session.
- 3) Write what you would like to have on your grave marker. You can talk this through or draw them or make them with construction paper. Tell why you have chosen what you have put on it.



- 4) In a basket put a bunch of tea bags (about 3 times more than people in the room) of different kinds. Have each person pass the basket and choose a tea bag that calls to them. Have them share why they chose that particular bag. Now ask the group, what do you know about that person because of what they just shared. An example: "I chose Earl Grey because it reminds me of my grandmother who used to drink it." From this you learn that they are attached to their grandmother, though this is not exactly what they said. Another example: "I chose passionfruit tea because I liked the name." You learned from this that the person was not afraid of the word passion and may be passionate about things. Check out your perceptions. "People are like teabags, you find out what they are made of when they are in hot water." (Eleanor Roosevelt quotation)
- 5) Unpack your purse or wallet on the table. From what is in the wallet, figure out what you value highly. You can explain the items to each other and tell why they matter, or you can put the collections around the room and have people guess whose is whose (take out things with name of person or turn them over).
Another way to do this is for persons to take out the most important thing they carry and tell the group what it tells about them. You can follow this up by giving the people a little card with scripture or small token they can carry of their faith.

You can order items with the chalice symbol on them from Christian Board of Publication.

- 6) Draw a picture with 6 concentric circles. Label them from the inner circle toward the edge with one category per circle as follows: family, church friends, other close friends, casual friends, fellow citizens, global citizens. Have people place names on these categories and then ask these questions for discussion starting or journaling before discussion: How do you share your faith with each of the circles? Where do you feel most comfortable or uncomfortable sharing your faith? Where might God be inviting you to grow in each circle as a witness?
- 7) Gary Chapman has written and spoken about five languages of love and says that each of us give and receive love in these languages. He goes further to say that we value some languages of love over others. They are:

Acts of service
Spending quality time
Giving gifts
Touching
Words of affirmation'

It seems to me that these are also ways we show love to God. What is your primary love language in human relationships? What about with God? How do



you receive love most clearly? Do people know this about you? Find ways to show love to each member of the group in their preferred way of being loved. Think about ways you might stretch yourself in learning new languages of love as a giver and recipient. How does this affect you as you serve as an Elder?

- 8) Make a list of 20 places you will go in the next month. After the list is made, identify how you might witness to your faith in Jesus in those places. Which ones are easy? Which ones are difficult to come up with a method?

- 9) Place an empty chair in the room and ask for volunteers who will pretend that they are telling someone about what Jesus means to them in their lives OR what their congregation or wider church has meant to them OR how prayer changes how they live. You can then reflect with each other and affirm each other about what you heard and saw. **DO NOT CORRECT ANOTHER PERSON'S TESTIMONY!!!** You can also put a smiling face in the chair of one of your group members who can encourage the testimony with their eyes. It is better if this person does not speak when you are first trying this. After trying it for awhile, you can add the dimension of the person in the chair asking gentle and increasingly hard clarifying questions to move the boundaries of the testimony. Go gentle on this exercise. No right or wrong way to testify!

- 10) Answer these questions on paper and then share, as willing, with the whole group. These are paraphrased from a similar activity from Sydney Simon's book from 1972, ***Values Clarification***.
 - I would be willing to die for...
 - I would be willing to physically fight for...
 - I would argue strongly in favor of...
 - I would quietly take a position in favor of...
 - I will share only with friends my belief that...
 - I prefer to keep to myself my belief that...
 - (do not ask people to share these)

- 11) Use sentence completion from these conversation spurs to open sharing:
 - I have always wanted to.....
 - I never ever want to.....
 - I would like to tell my friend, (fill in the name), about Jesus, but.....
 - I hope that before I die I will.....
 - I would like to be friends with.....
 - The thing I do best is.....



What I like about my congregation the best is.....
What I think God is calling me to do more of these days is.....
I knew Jesus was real when.....
I am very afraid of.....
When I am truly joyful, I.....
What I think would solve the problems of hunger in the world is.....
The place my faith is growing is.....
The person I love the most is.....

Hands on Faith Sharing Activities

These ideas are for making or doing things that reinforce learning religious lessons. In children's Sunday school classes, we have always known that kids learn from the crafts we teach. Adults often have a lot of the kid left in them in this regard. Experiment and enjoy creating and doing faithful sharing.

- 1) Take a plastic one-gallon milk jug washed and dry. Gather as many stickers, pens, scissors, magazines, pipe cleaners or what have you and place them in the middle of the circle. You might want to be at a table for this activity. Explain that this jug is the church. You hold the church in your life time. You have inherited it from others and will pass it on to many you will never know. IN SILENCE pass the milk jug around and invite people to do to the milk jug whatever it is that they would like to do to the church. After it is created, and it will be a masterwork, set it in the middle and look at it. Use these questions to debrief the experience:
 - ✦ What did you notice about the church you inherited?
 - ✦ Why did you do the things you did to it?
 - ✦ How did you feel during this task?

End this session with prayers for the global church and for healing in all congregations — including your own.

- 2) Create a board game that has to do with your congregation's life. Make it simple to play and not take TOO long. Every community has unspoken rules, so work those into your game.
- 3) Draw a shield and create a coat of arms for yourself. Include on it things that symbolize your family, your faith, your gifts, your experiences. Share why this



shield represents you. OR Design a logo for your group of Elders that defines who you see them to be in the congregation.

- 4) Make a license plate that expresses your faith. Be creative and light hearted. Have lots of colored pens and stickers available. If possible make a fake local plate that looks like those from your area as a template.
- 5) Draw a line across a large sheet of paper for each person. Ask people to pretend this line represents their life. Have them mark it off in equal sections for the decades they have lived and plot the major turning points in their lives. They can note high points by going above the line and low points by going below the line in the drawing.

Prompting remarks might include:

- ✦ Remember significant births, deaths, marriages and divorces
- ✦ Remember job changes
- ✦ Remember moves and schools, joining and leaving churches
- ✦ Remember successes and what felt like failures.

Unpack this experience by sharing the life lines and using questions like:

- ✦ When was God's presence most clear to you in your life?
- ✦ When did the church mean the most to you in your life?
- ✦ What is the key thing you would want this group to know about your life?

- 6) On a large sheet of paper write the word blessings in big bold letters. Using this as a takeoff point, make a crossword puzzle naming blessings you have received recently either individually or in your congregation. For instance, through the letter "b" you might find the word **stability** or **babies** or **budget** increase. The next person can connect to either the word blessing or the words that have been added. See if you can fill the page. Pray in thanksgiving for these many blessings.
- 7) Keep a blessings jar in your group and name your blessings by putting coins in the jar. When it is full give it to a ministry in your congregation or community.
- 8) At a sporting goods store, purchase the fishing line leaders that clip together and make bracelets out of them to remind yourselves of the disciples who left their nets to follow Jesus. Share what you might need to leave behind to more fully follow our savior. Wear the bracelets for a week and tell people you see what they signify to you.



- 9) Find someone who knows how to do origami paper folding or take a book on this art out of the library. Show how the same square of paper can become so many different shapes depending on the choices made. Review the biggest choices you have made and how they have shifted the shape of your life.

