

# Introduction

## TO RECREATION & COMMUNITY BUILDING

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We are excited to share a variety of recreation plans that you can tailor to your gathering! Our team has put together a collection of games for opening recreation and community building time, decorating ideas for different spaces (whether indoor or outdoor), games to play around the table at mealtimes, and a theme party plan that is highly adaptable. This guide is designed to help you take a group from name games to mix and mingle activities, from small group play onto group building activities – all of which can be debriefed and discussed in light of the theology of recreation.

### **THEOLOGY OF RECREATION**

What does the Bible say about play, building community, and being in relationship with one another? Is it possible that through the childlike act of play, we can experience living in community with our neighbors as God intended? In order to truly understand and acknowledge one another as Christians, we must first be willing to set aside our own agendas and simply experience the joy that comes from sharing trust and time together. Unless the church at large can grasp this and until we are able to do this, our true Christian selves will remain stifled and muted.

How, then, can being in community help us to build trust and acknowledge that we are all children of God? When we experience play together, we have the opportunity to forget about everything else and just be present in the moment with one another. We can be fully aware of God's grace and fulfilling scripture by living an abundant life.

Scripture tells us that God revels in us discovering the joyful, playful, and lighthearted side of the church. In Philippians, Paul tells us to “rejoice in the Lord always – and AGAIN I say rejoice.” In Ecclesiastes, the scripture tells us that there is a time to dance and a time to laugh. The scriptures are full of language that not only encourages but demands us to be in joyful community with one another.

In Rachel Henderlite's book, *A Call to Faith*, she writes that the chief end for humankind is to enjoy God. In the enjoyment of God, we worship, and in the enjoyment of humans and nature, we play. It is the church's responsibility to remind youth that play and enjoyment have a real and important part in the Kingdom of grace. Playing together opens doors for relational growth and the development of cohesive relationships that can strengthen our faith community.

So, how do we do this? What kinds of activities and games can we facilitate in order to bring about this sense of grace and faith? How do we lead people to a place where they can let their guard down and realize that, through recreation, we have the ability to share in laughter with one another?

## **RECREATION BASICS**

With little more than pencils, paper, dice, balls, old magazines, popsicle sticks, pipe cleaners and play dough, this packet will help you to provide a variety of activities that can engage your group. Inherent to the theology of recreation are a few basic tenants that we should not assume everyone knows.

First and foremost, the word recreation comes from *re-creation*. Therefore, we are constantly striving to build groups and individuals up – not to tear them down, embarrass them, or put them on the spot. That type of play might be called “wreckreation,” not recreation. It is important to remember that in rejoicing in God’s playful nature we are in essence glorifying God.

When you play games that eliminate people or make one person the butt of the game, you are pulling down your group and engaging in behavior that is negative in nature. In this world, youth may already get more than their fair share of negativity on a daily basis. Recreation is a time for each of us to begin building one another up and creating community.

Another thing to consider is avoiding the use of food as a “prop” or “supply” in a game or activity. There are a number of issues that go along with using food in play, including safety. As a leader, you are responsible for the safety of your group at all times. It is important to be sensitive to youth who are dealing with eating disorders and youth with food allergies. Many of us are also familiar with the game of cramming as many saltines in your mouth as you can and then whistling a tune. The likelihood of choking during this “game” is high, putting both you and your youth at risk.

With issues of global hunger and scarce food resources, the wastefulness of using food products to play games is also difficult to justify. Using our food resources wisely is a way we can honor God’s creation. The same goes for other types of resources. Whenever possible use paper that has been placed in the recycle bins, collect old magazines, newspapers, etc.

Lastly, using games to explore scripture is a fantastic way of showing your youth how relevant the Word is! A game can be a tool to explore more about a passage or to creatively express the theme of the scripture, all while incorporating multiple intelligences and learning styles. What better way to experience scripture than to play a game and then go back to actively discuss what just happened?

Here is a short list of leadership techniques to keep in the back of your mind.

- Do it, then talk about it. Demonstrate, then explain. This helps those who are visual learners!
- Be prepared, but at the same time be flexible. If a game is not going over well, then move on.
- Remember that sometimes groups need you to provide parameters so that everyone can fully engage in the activity.

- If you mess something up, laugh, grin, and move on!
- Remember that you are ENABLING the group to build community and therefore the focus is NOT on you as a leader. The focus should be on the group and their ability to play together.

*In God we live and move and have our being! Acts 17:28*

