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# **Suggestions for Group Discussion Based on the Book *Games Grandmas Play: Life Lessons on Christian Faith and Grandchildren***

**(Grandfathers and Surrogate Grandparents are welcome!)**

## ***Introduction***

### **Ready, Get Set, Go (Beginning to Play)**

1. Whether you are a family or a surrogate grandparent, describe who your grandchildren are, how old they are, where they live, and so on.
2. Share a memory, negative or positive, of your own grandmother or grandfather. What kind of person was she or he? How influential was she or he in your life?
3. Comment on the changing role of grandparents over the last half-century or so.
4. Some games, such as Chutes and Ladders or Tag, seem to last over generations; new ones, like video games, arrive. Do you have an opinion about the video games children play today? If you have a low opinion of them, do you relate your views to your families?
5. If you had a choice of any activity with a grandchild (game, trip, excursion, etc.) and money and energy were not a problem, what would it be?
6. *Games Grandmas Play* is oriented to Christian faith. Would you be willing to let the group know something about your own religious background? Has your prevailing understanding of God been life giving or life suppressing?

## Hide and Seek (Listening and Being Found)

1. Does anyone remember seriously experiencing the old saying “Children should be seen and not heard”? How has the atmosphere in our country for children changed over the years?
2. Discuss what it means for children to hide and to be found. Why do young children find it hard to stay hidden long?
3. Adults can hide as well as children. Discuss why adult hiding is so different from a child’s game of Hide and Seek.
4. Suggest qualities that make for someone who listens well.
  - a. Without mentioning names, can you think of anyone in your circle of friends or acquaintances who listens?
  - b. Silently, on a scale from 1 to 10, evaluate yourself as a good listener. Any comments?
5. We seniors have years of accumulated experience and wisdom. Discuss the pros and cons of this statement: “Listening to oneself is an important thing to do.”
6. Jesus called his friend Nathaniel a “man in whom was no guile.” *Guile* is defined as “deceit or duplicity.” Describe a person who is without guile.

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## The Playground (Making Choices)

1. If you were economically free and all the world were pristine and geographically available, where would you choose to take an extended vacation?
2. Jesus was a man of questions, asking and receiving them. Discuss the atmosphere in any situation where questions are encouraged. How does that change when it's understood that questions are not acceptable? Does anyone have an experience of either atmosphere?
3. Regarding the choices children are given:
  - a. What are the difference between choices children have now and had fifty years ago?
  - b. In what ways may children not be as free to choose as they once were?
  - c. Has anyone had an "adventure" in giving a grandchild a choice?
  - d. Does anyone differ with the parents of grandchildren about choices that are allowed?
4. As a child or a grown-up, can you remember an invitation to make a choice that, in fact, was no choice at all? What happened?
5. Name a few areas in which you can make critical choices about your own well-being.

### Puzzles (Working Through It)

1. Is anyone in the group a puzzle fan? If so, what kind?
2. Curiosity plays a role in puzzle solving and in learning. What happens to dampen or kill curiosity?
3. Patience is a puzzle-solving tool. Enumerate the emotions one can have when another person is genuinely patient in the face of a problem that takes awhile to work through.
4. Praying for people who are involved in real-life puzzles is one way to collaborate. Discuss other possible efforts toward collaboration.
5. Would you agree that most adult puzzles involve troubled or broken relationships? Why or why not?
6. What could be considered a “missing piece” in our lives when we are trying to resolve some difficulty?

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## Coloring (Living Inside and Outside Expectations)

1. Sometimes we lump people into big categories, such as seeing life as a glass half-empty or half-full. Is this a possibility: People tend to color either inside or outside the lines? Do you see yourself as one who colors inside or outside the lines?
2. Based on parental expectations, discuss the ways children can “color outside the lines.” Has anyone seen this in operation?
3. Do the expectations of parents and grandparents differ? If so, how?
4. The phrase “civil disobedience” can generate apprehension or even anxiety. Why?
5. What is your reaction to civil disobedience in a righteous cause? Discuss this either in respect to the civil rights movement in the '50s and '60s, to the involvement of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in a plot to kill Hitler, or to the disruption in our nation over the war in Vietnam.
6. Jesus was faced with the question of who held authority: God the Father, the religious leaders, or the Roman government? Did Jesus color outside the lines?

### **SORRY (Managing the Musts)**

1. Life is full of things that must be done. Name one ordinary “Must” that you enjoy and one “Must” you would gladly hand off to someone else.
2. Discuss to what extent we create our own “Musts.”
3. What is your personal take on the “Musts” of grandparenting: Do you welcome them, make do with them, or avoid them? Do you find it hard or easy to say “No” when asked to help?
4. Flexibility is a gracious quality in older people. Do you find it easy or difficult adjusting to: a) last-minute changes in family plans; b) economic setbacks; c) changes in the behavior of a family member? Any other situations that call for “flex”?
5. Is there a time when you have been the “primary emotional partner” for a grandchild or grandchildren?
6. The role of parent has been a long-standing one for grandparents. “Who is in control here?” is perhaps the biggest issue. Discuss the difficulties and/or lighter aspects of putting this role aside in relationship with your families or even with friends?

## Imagination (Coming Alive Inside)

1. Choose an impossible word from the dictionary (one example, *guar*) and write out a simple definition on a separate piece of paper (in this example, “a drought-resistant vegetable grown in warm climates”). Pass out pieces of paper and ask group members to write out what they imagine that word might mean, collect the papers, shuffle them, read them over to yourself so each will sound plausible, and then read each definition aloud, including the real one. Ask which one they think is correct. If you want to count points, award one point for the correct guess and one for each time a person accurately identifies a “definition” with the person who wrote it. (Commercially, this game is called Balderdash.)
2. A powerful wizard is going to turn you into a (nonhuman) animal. You have two minutes in which to decide what kind of animal you will become and why.
3. Let the group know what activities “light up your life”: reading books (what kinds), hobbies, recreational interests, playing with grandchildren.
4. Can you remember any imaginative play as a child? Any with your grandchildren? Any make-believe in which you’ve watched your grandchildren take part?
5. Can you see a way imagination can play a role in an uncomfortable relationship?
6. Talk about the possible role of imagination in one’s prayers.

## Chutes and Ladders (Handling the Ups and Downs)

1. The game is constructed so that the chutes are longer than the ladders and there are more chutes than ladders. State whether or not you think this reflects life in general.
2. When playing games with grandchildren do you tend to bend the rules or stick to them?
3. Name an instance or two when a grandchild has been disappointed or elated (maybe other than at Christmas).
4. When a person in the family expresses disappointment or is somehow let down, what is your more-or-less habitual response? Sympathize with the person? Ignore the problem? Try to fix it?
5. Do you think it's true that grandparents suffer over the pain of grandchildren as much as we did when our own children were young and in pain?
6. Would you be willing to express a major setback you've experienced as a person or in relationship to family? Is it still in the chute category?
7. What is the most recent serendipitous thing you've enjoyed?

## Scrabble (Playing With What You Have)

1. Is anyone in the group a Scrabble enthusiast? If so, did he or she ever beat 400? Were there any variations in the game?
2. When considering the growth and behavior of grandchildren, which side do you come out on, nature (that is, heredity) or nurture (environment)? Provide concrete observations, please.
3. What are some of the difficult “tiles” our grandchildren have on their “shelves”?
4. What colors in the spectrum would you use to illustrate a sense of resignation in life? To picture acceptance of ourselves where we are?
5. Do you know anyone (naming no names) whose general ambience is resignation? In what specific ways is that defeating (e.g., with regard to health or relationships)?
6. Comment on the sentence in the book “All change begins with acceptance.” Why would that be true?
7. The Bible states that God doesn’t change (James 1:17) and that by definition God is love (1 John 4:8). How can the changelessness of a loving God encourage us in becoming more open, accepting, caring?

## Little League and Beyond (Becoming a Spectator)

1. Suggest your favorite spectator sport and why you enjoy it. What has been an exciting game you've watched?
2. The spectator role is sobering, yet we all eventually find ourselves there. What are the essential differences between being on the field and in the stands? Are they physical? Spiritual? Emotional?
3. Have you had to give up an activity you thoroughly enjoyed? How did you handle it?
4. In our success-oriented culture, we forget that God identifies with us when we suffer. Jesus spent his time with people who suffered—physically, economically, emotionally, and spiritually. How can this help us as we interact with people going through pain?
5. In what ways can we be supportive to family and friends even when we're sitting in the stands?
6. Has anyone had an experience of learning more about oneself while being with grandchildren?

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## God's Game Plan (Being Part of the Ultimate Game)

1. Have you thought about what heaven is like? Has anyone ever shared his or her views about heaven with you? One grandfather, an avid gardener, stated that if the streets in heaven are gold he isn't interested in going. If God let you be the architect of heaven, what are some features you'd build into this final and wonderful place for us to be?
2. The loss of a beloved pet can be devastating. Has anyone had that experience? A Sunday school teacher once told her class that there will be no animals in heaven because animals don't have souls. Yet the apostle Paul writes about the whole creation groaning and longing for redemption (Romans 8:22–23). How do you feel about this statement?
3. The artist who drew the sketches in the book couldn't bear to put Grandma in bed (as the author had suggested) and instead placed her in a recliner. Why do you think she did that?
4. Here we are, sitting in a circle or around a table or in someone's living room, talking about "the ultimate game." Is death too serious to have that designation? How does the Celtic view of death help to lighten the load?
5. What do we learn from our culture about aging and dying?
6. What is your most recent experience of death?