

# GAME ON: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



July 2019 (30 June - 03 August)



It's July, summer is in full swing (hopefully...) and many of us enjoy taking advantage of the longer days and better weather to fit in more fun, games and sports. Maybe we are dusting off the running shoes, joining pals for a kick about in the park, or picking up a new hobby in the evening after work.

Summer can be a great time for games — running about while the sun blazes or enjoying a board game as the rain trickles down the windows. The restless days are a little longer and the possibilities are endless. Our loving God loves and blesses our sense of fun and adventure. God is at the games table, hiding with us in our newly built den in the middle of a game of tig, cheering us on at the stadium and keeping pace alongside as we jog round the park.

This month, as we continue to read the Bible together, we are going to think about the skills we develop from the games we play with one another. How can we apply these insights to our wider life and faith?

- What do sports teach us about endurance?
- How is being a disciple like being a team player?
- How can rules actually increase our freedom rather than limit it?
- How can we win, draw and lose well (in games and life)?
- How can games help us discover our 'flow state'?

Our creator God delights in us and wants us to enjoy living, working and playing together. Games are a great way to celebrate the sheer joy of being alive as blessed children of God. This month let's discover how the Bible informs our play and how our play informs how we read the Bible. Right - game on!

*The following discussion questions are designed to accompany the [Game On Resource Pack](#) to help adapt the material for small group work. They are divided into 5 parts to correspond with the 5 weeks of the Daily Worship theme. **These questions are just a guideline and there is no need to go through all questions in a single session, or in the following sequence. Feel free to pick and choose what interests your group.***

# GAME ON: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## Part 1: Striving and persevering - Games as training

### Conversation Starter

This month our theme invites us to consider what games and sports can teach us about a life of faith. Are there any games you enjoy playing? Such as sports, card games, boardgames, puzzles?

What is it that you enjoy about them?

What is that frustrates you about them?

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### Read Psalm 77

The psalmist, in a time of trouble, gets motivation by reaching out to God. Many of us when pushing against our limits when playing an intense sport or game find ourselves recalling past experiences to give us the strength to continue.

Can you think of a time when you had to 'dig deep' in the middle of a game, sport or another kind of competition? Maybe it was to push yourself over the finish line, or over the bar?

Remembering past experiences can help you dig deeper — in the middle of a game and in the middle of life. Can you think of a time when recalling memories from the past has helped you overcome an obstacle in your life?

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### Read Galatians 5:13-25

Spending time working together as a team or striving graciously against an opponent in a game gives us ways of practicing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

What have you learned about yourself from playing games over the years? What kind of 'player' are you?

How can playing games help you improve your self control?

How can playing games help you to become more kind, generous and faithful?

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### Read Hebrews 12: 1-3

Jesus is our pioneer, perfecter, and pacemaker! He helps us push that bit further. With Jesus setting the pace where might we end up?

Professional runners, swimmers and cyclists have whole teams working obsessively to reduce any excess weight in their clothing and equipment to make them as aerodynamic as possible.

What are the weights and baggage we need to leave behind so that we are better able to run along with Jesus?

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## Part 2: It's ma ba - I'm going hame!

### Read 2 Kings 5:1-14

Naaman wanted healed but on his own terms. The advice he got was basically "Suck it up buttercup!" When playing games and our emotions are running high we can be incredibly petulant when things don't go our way. It's tempting to say "It's my ba, I'm going hame" and storm off. Sometimes it takes wiser heads around us to counsel us (see verses 3 and 13 of the reading) to do the right thing.

To play well and live well we have to listen to the advice of others. Can you think of a time in your life when you struggled to accept the advice? This might have been during a game or in another context.

Why do we often ask for advice but then only want to receive it on our terms?

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### Read Galatians 6: 1-10

Another temptation when playing games, is to lord other people's mistakes over them.

The words of this reading would make a good halftime team talk for a group of argumentative players. Don't moan about every little mistake your teammates make — instead help them sensitively to carry their burdens.

It's sound advice, but how do you carry it out in practice?

How do you (as the NRSVA translates it) "restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness"?

When you're upset and carried away in a high pressure environment, such as in the middle of a competitive game, how do you compose yourself enough in order to be gentle with others?

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### Read Jonah 4

Jonah, the reluctant prophet, is fed up. As we say in Scotland — he is absolutely *scunnered*. He feels nothing has gone to plan and he is totally gubbed. He even says to God abruptly that he is "angry enough to die."

It's easy in the heat of the moment to get caught up in the intensity and lose sight of the big picture. When we are in such a mindset we often latch on to one setback and blow it up out of proportion. For Jonah it was the bush, for us it will be something other detail not turning out as we expected.

When we are in this zone of obsessing over small disappointments, how do we take a step back to look at the bigger picture? Sure, it's disappointing to lose the bush but should it make Jonah "angry enough to die"?

What helps you to step back and get a sense of perspective?

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## Part 3: Learning the way - following the rules...

### Read Psalm 82

"Referee!" In verse 8 it's like the psalmist is calling for the umpire to intervene, "Come on ref!" Many contests rely on an adjudicator who stands apart, observing the play to make impartial decisions and resolve disputes. It's an incredibly difficult, and stressful position to be in — having to balance competing cries of injustice.

Thanks to instant replay technology, a lot of televised sports now have a strange otherworldly quality as the video referee 'from above' interrupts play with special insight.

Is the metaphor of a referee a useful one for thinking about God?

In what ways is God like a referee?

In what ways is God not like a referee?

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### Read Deuteronomy 30: 8-14

People often have negative associations with the idea of 'rules' but games and sports are made up almost entirely of rules. They give a framework that sets expectations and enables participation. Without rules chess would simply be an ornament and cricket an exercise in jogging aimlessly around a field and swinging a bat from time to time.

This reading is an invitation to internalise the rules 'in your heart' so that they become a second nature.

Sports teams have coaches, training sessions and drills to reinforce the rules and tactics of the game. What can we learn from this approach and apply to our life of faith? How can we help to *train* one another in the important rules of life?

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### Read Luke 10: 25-37

You can imagine that the priest and the Levite in the story could have quoted all kinds of rules to justify their actions. But the Samaritan follows a higher rule and goes above and beyond for the sake of the injured man.

Life is usually more complicated than the games we play — throwing us unusual dilemmas and making us make difficult decisions. Yet if we internalise the rules, Jesus's priorities, and get a good sense of the game we don't have to be able to quote every page of a rulebook to know what to do.

How can we be 'Good Samaritans' in our everyday life — breaking the rules of what's expected of us and going above and beyond for our neighbours?

# GAME ON: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## Part 4: Win, lose or draw

It's the taking part that counts...

Is it really?

It doesn't always feel like it. Part of the fun of games is the sense of jeopardy, of putting it all down on the line; the end result of who put more beanbags through a hoop, or balls into a net, or plastic tokens into a pile, might be ultimately meaningless — but that doesn't mean it doesn't *matter*.

In games, and in life, we can struggle to win, lose or draw well; but in both life and games the key is to participate with grace. How can we live and play graciously, keeping our eyes on the ultimate prize?

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### Read Amos 8: 1-12

A dramatic vision of sowing your own defeat. The experience of a crushing loss — of everything going wrong and having to pay for it.

Even if the stakes are much lower, we still feel the pain of loss (especially self inflicted loss ) acutely when playing or watching games. One of the good things about games is that they can provide us with a safe space to feel intense emotions and learn to deal with them.

Can you think of a time when you were playing or watching a game and everything went wrong? Everything just fell apart? How did you put yourself together again afterwards?

How do you cope with defeat?

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### Read Psalm 52

When playing a game a 'bad loser' is no fun; someone who won't let go and accept defeat. But arguably what is worse is a 'bad winner'; someone who boasts smugly and insufferably when they win.

The psalmist here calls out 'a bad winner' who lords it over others.

Who are some of the 'bad winners' in our society? The ungracious people doing well at the expense of others?

How can we call them out and encourage them to have a better sense of sportsmanship?

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## Part 4: Win, lose or draw

### Read Proverbs 17: 22

Drawing out the positives!

Sometimes we can *win well* and *lose well* but *draw* badly. For a player it can be a struggle to cope with the irritating ambiguity of draw. For spectators an inconclusive impasse can be more frustrating than a valiant loss.

This proverb uses expressive language to remind us to accentuate the positive. Have you ever felt so crushed that it felt like your bones were drying up?

Our everyday lives sometimes have 'draws' in them: moments when the result of a given situation is ambivalent — not straightforwardly *good* or *bad*, just... complicated. Looking to the bright side and 'rounding up', without giving into frustration can have a profound affect on our wellbeing.

What are some of the 'draws' we come across in our life — the situations that are thorny, ambivalent and hard to resolve?

How can we face them with a cheerful heart?

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## Part 5: The sheer joy of being alive

### Read Psalm 85

"...righteousness and peace will kiss" is a beautiful way of expressing a vision of harmony, a perfect joyful moment — when everything coming together.

Sports often give us these blissful moments of separate elements combining to create the perfect sequence such as the beautifully timed chip that sends a glorious shot sailing under the crossbar to score the winning goal in the 89th minute.

Joy is a universal feeling but it is experienced in a personal way. It can be fascinating to see how others see the world and what brings them joy.

What do you love doing? It might be playing a game, or going for a run, or cooking a meal, or going for a hill walk or playing the guitar — what brings you sheer joy?

What does it look like when you do that thing and everything comes together perfectly? Share with the group what that would be for you. It could be a sunset at the crest of the hill, a searing guitar solo, the perfectly barbecued burger...

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### Read Philippians 4: 8-9

Athletes and performers sometimes talk about getting into a 'flow state' when they are mentally in the zone and focusing on the right things. They tune out distractions and hit the sweet spot — fully committed and enjoying what they are doing — perhaps visualising what it will be like to succeed in order to realise the success.

Paul, in the reading, is inviting us into our flow state. What helps you to feel focused and 'in the zone'?

How can we help one another to meditate on true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable excellent and worthy things?

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### Read Luke 11: 5-13

Knock on the door! Ask for a fish! Push the boat out and ask for an egg! Embrace life, run with it, go for goal! Games and sports give us opportunities to set targets for ourselves, to motivate us to continue developing our skills. As a group take the opportunity to think about some goals you can set yourself as you embrace life and 'knock on the door'!

This year... What do you want to discover? What do you want to learn? What do you want to develop? What do you want to achieve?

Thinking perhaps of the training strategies that sportspeople use, what are the practical things we can do to help test, shape and realise these goals?