

Sharing in Jesus' Humanity

A Workshop Presented by Lisa Bortner, National ECW President

Inspired by a workshop created by Fleetwood Range.

Purpose: To help individuals reach a conscious awareness of their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and values regarding Jesus' humanity and our own values.

Objectives: At the completion of the simulation, each participant will be able to:

1. Identify our own thoughts, feelings, and attitudes.
2. Clarify our own values.
3. Have a better understanding of Jesus' own trials at the cross.

Type: Group experience

Equipment:

1. 1 packet of 12 slips of paper for each individual in group
2. 1 pencil for each individual in group
3. Overhead transparency of Questions for Discussion (optional)

Introduction:

Welcome, everyone.

Today we enter a reflective and sacred space together—one that invites courage, openness, and a willingness to be honest with ourselves. This workshop, *Sharing in Jesus' Humanity*, draws inspiration from an experience created by Fleetwood Range. Its purpose is not to frighten or burden us, but to help us look gently and truthfully at our own humanity—and, in doing so, to recognize with gratitude the life we have been given.

Each of us carries thoughts, feelings, values, hopes, attachments, and fears—some deeply cherished, others rarely spoken aloud. In this experience, we will explore these inner places with intention. As we consider what we hold dear, what we fear losing, and how we respond to vulnerability, we also gain insight into Jesus' humanity—His fear, His loneliness, His grief, His love, and His courage on the road to the cross.

This is also a time to notice gratitude: gratitude for the people, abilities, possessions, and moments that shape our lives; gratitude for the love that has sustained us; and gratitude for God's presence even in times of uncertainty and loss. Often we do not fully recognize the depth of our gratitude until we imagine what it might mean to let something go.

We are not here to judge ourselves or one another. Instead, this is a chance to recognize our values more clearly, to see what shapes our hearts, and to reflect on how Jesus shares our human experience in all its depth and complexity. I invite you to participate honestly, honor your own reactions, and respect the experiences of those around you. What you

discover today may be emotional, enlightening, uncomfortable, or comforting—and all of that is welcome here.

Let us begin with openness, curiosity, gratitude for the gift of life, and trust in God’s Spirit guiding us through this time.

Procedures and Instructions:

A. Distribute packets of paper and give following instructions. Each person is given two minutes to complete each task.

1. You will write something on each slip of paper as I give you instructions. Choose 3 slips of paper. On each one, write the name of someone who is very dear to you. Please remember to write down only one person on each piece of paper. You can’t write the word “family,” but you can put an individual family member on each sheet. These can include living or deceased people. You may also include pets as well.
2. Choose 3 more slips of paper. On each one, write one thing you own that you regard as very special. These must be material things, tangible items, that you consider highly and that you value very much. These could be things such as a journal, a home, a car, or piece of jewelry. Perhaps you value your computer, your Serta Mattress or a family heirloom. You may not include people, as they are not possessions. Please write only one item on each slip of paper, three pieces of paper with one item on each sheet.
3. Choose 3 more slips of paper. On each one, write one activity in which you enjoy participating. These should be activities that bring you great joy, feelings of self-worth or value.
4. On the last three slips of paper that are left, write one personal attribute of which you are proud. It could be such things as patience, loyalty, or kindness.
5. Arrange the 12 slips of paper in front of you so that you can see all of them. As you place them in front of you, contemplate the importance of these in your life. The good memories and experiences, and the joy they bring you.
6. Now get into a comfortable position and take a deep relaxing breath. Listen without comment and follow the instructions I give you while I describe some happenings, some situations, and some people.

B. I’m now going to tell you a story. This is a story about you. I want you to consider what you would be feeling and thinking about as these events happen to you.

It’s a warm summer day and you have worked hard and played hard all day long. You’re feeling good about yourself and about life. You head home and decide to take a shower before heading off to bed. As you are drying yourself off after your shower, you notice something that was not there before. It is a lump where one should not be. It is small, but painful. Fear strikes you deep. You brush it off thinking that you’re just imagining it to be something it’s not. You find you cannot sleep much tonight.

Despite your wishes, the lump continues to enlarge and to become more painful. The fear about this lump begins to affect other areas of your life; you feel anxious and worried. You tell a loved one about the lump and you call the doctor for an appointment. The process has begun – it’s time for you to give away something in your life. It is time for you to give up one of your slips of paper. Please choose a slip of paper, crumple it up and toss it away.

You have 30 seconds to select and tear up 1 of your slips of paper.

For the next several days you worry and then you find yourself in the doctor’s waiting room. You feel nervous – your senses are heightened. You notice everything in the room: the ticking clock, the receptionist clicking her pen, the worn out magazines, and the fish tank gurgling air bubbles. You realize that you’re feeling anxious. You tell yourself that you’re making a big deal about nothing. Your name is called and you jump a little. Your heart is beating faster now as the doctor takes a history and you try to second-guess why he is asking all of those questions about malignancy in your family history. “Oh, it’s probably nothing,” he says with a look of worry on his face “But we ought to do some further tests just to be sure.” As these things run through your mind, more loss and more fear occurs, **so take a slip of paper now and crumple it up.** “We’ll know by Friday,” says the doctor, smiling reassuringly. “I’ll call you.” You get into your car and drive the few miles home.

1. You are back home—who is there? Who do you want to be there? What do you say? What do you want to hear?

Crumple up another paper and throw it away.

It’s two more days until Friday. You try to keep your mind off of what might happen, but no matter how many other ways you try to distract yourself, you keep coming back to the lump. Your family is helpful – too helpful as a matter of fact. You think a lot about “What if?” and “How would they make ends meet if I really got sick?” It’s only Wednesday night, and time is dragging on slowly. A tear comes to your eye – life is *really* precious . . . your family means so much . . . **Please take away one more slip of paper.**

Thursday plods along and Friday is finally here. You didn’t sleep too well last night. “Oh, it’s nothing,” you tell yourself, but deep down you wonder. The day seems to drag on and you wonder why you haven’t been called yet. At about two o’clock in the afternoon the phone rings. It is the nurse at the doctor’s office. “Could you come in at about 3:30?” she asks, “The doctor wants to speak with you.” Fear strikes you deeper this time and you worry about what sort of news it is that the doctor can’t talk about over the telephone. Slowly, methodically, you prepare to go into the doctor’s office. The lump is still there and you feel it has grown larger just this week.

It is time to give up yet another slip of paper, another thing of value.

The doctor’s examination room is colder this time and feels more sterile. He examines the lump again and does some routine tests, then asks you to dress and come to his office.

As you walk to his office, your heart begins to beat faster and your legs feel like rubber. The doctor sits in a chair next to you and the words you have dreaded to hear are finally spoken: “I’m afraid I have some bad news for you.” You can’t remember all that the doctor says in the next few minutes, but the words “surgery,” “radiation,” and “chemotherapy” stands out. You thought you could take this bad news. You thought you’d be strong. But now loss, grief, fear, anxiety and loneliness all have a new meaning. [Pause]

Please give up one more slip of paper and throw it into the center of the table.

1. You are back home—who is there? Who do you want to be there? What do you say? What do you want to hear?

A week goes by.

The surgery goes well, so the doctor said, and he prescribes a mixture of radiation and chemotherapy as a proper course of action. You have a leave of absence from your work responsibilities and the doctor talks in terms of six to eight months of recuperation, but won’t be much more specific than that. Money is a problem, sure, but it’s a stress you hardly have time to think about what with appointments, medications and adjusting to having good days and bad days. Things are different now, and it’s hard to realize that so much of your life has changed in just a few short weeks.

A month goes by.

The friends that were so supportive at the time of your operation are strangely silent now; it’s not that they dislike you; it’s just that they avoid you, like your disease was contagious or something. “Maybe it’s the way I look,” you say to yourself, as you look in the mirror and see the gaunt features that are only a shadow of what you once looked like. “My skin, my hair – will I ever look the same?” you ask. You have lost weight and you cry more now. Your life seems to be slipping away: the body has lost a great deal of its energy; recreation activities have lost their pleasure now. Why, even going to the bathroom is difficult. You have changed. Life has changed. **Now it is time to give up one more slip of paper and toss it to the center of the table.**

Two months later—you are aware your symptoms are worsening and you are feeling weaker. Where are you? What is your lifestyle? What do you continue to do? What can you do?

Tear up one piece of paper.

Several months pass and you know somehow, deep inside, that you’re not getting any better – one clue was that the doctor stopped all treatments today. He tells you that they have worked as well as they can, but you wonder if he isn’t just abandoning you because there’s nothing left for curative medicine to do. You are confined to bed most of the time; the yard outside is full of weeds and the early signs of winter are coming on. Your family and friends from out-of-state come more often now and it begins, slowly at first, to dawn on you that the end, your death, is in sight.

Please give away two more areas of your life now, two more precious slips of paper.

Four months later—you are undeniably ill. The pain has increased considerably. Where are you? Who stays with you? Who visits you? Who are the people you want around you?

Tear up 1 slips of paper.

Six months have passed, and you find that even the smallest activity of daily living takes most of your energy. How do you feel about yourself? Where are you? Who is with you?

Look at the last two slips of paper. Place them side by side. If you are born in an even month, throw away the slip of paper on your right. If you are born in an uneven month, throw away the slip of paper on your left.

God has now come for you. **Tear up your last slip of paper.** You are dead!

Discussion of Experiences

1. Give 15-20 seconds of time to react and follow the last instruction. Say something reassuring, such as

- “Thanks for your involvement.”
- “Everyone’s reaction to this simulation is different.”
- **“This can be painful for you, depending upon your experience with death and dying.”**
- “I appreciate the thoughtfulness and effort you have put into this experience. You have done well, and now are ready for the next part.”

2. In small groups of 3 or 4, with one person acting as recorder, initiate discussion of some or all of the following questions:

- What issues arose for you with each scenario? Fears? Concerns? Where was God during this?
- What were the easiest items to give up? Most difficult?
- What emotional reactions did you have with each scenario? (*Watch for denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, avoidance, relief, comfort...*)
- What did you think, feel, and/or experience when I told you to randomly take away one slip of paper. Did I take the “right” one?
- Did you anticipate or expect the content of the last scenario?

- What were your thoughts, feelings, and/or reaction to God taking the last slip of paper?
- How do you think this relates to God's choice to give up his only son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins?

Please take 5 minutes to discuss the questions.

Now let's come back together. I would like to hear from just a few of you about your table discussions. Who would like to share?

Conclusion:

Thank you for the honesty, courage, and vulnerability you brought into this experience. The slips of paper you held represented real pieces of your life—your relationships, joys, possessions, abilities, and sources of meaning. Letting them go, even symbolically, can stir deep emotions. Wherever you found yourself—whether calm, unsettled, grateful, resistant, or overwhelmed—your responses were real and valuable.

This experience often awakens gratitude in unexpected ways: gratitude for what we still have, for what we have loved deeply, and even for the awareness of how precious life truly is. Sometimes gratitude is quiet. Sometimes it is painful. Sometimes it arrives only after loss. All of these expressions are holy.

This exercise also reminds us that Jesus walked fully within the fragile human experience—uncertainty, fear, pain, loss, loneliness, and the approach of death. He knew what it meant to release everything, even His own life, trusting completely in God's love. When we explore our own humanity honestly, we gain a deeper understanding of how profound His sacrifice was, how costly His love, and how fully He chose to share our human story.

As we leave this time, I invite you to carry both reflection and gratitude with you:

- Gratitude for the people and experiences that have shaped you
- Gratitude for the strength that has carried you through loss
- Gratitude for a Savior who understands our humanity from the inside out

And let us continue to reflect:

What does it mean for us that God willingly gave His only Son?

How does Jesus' humanity speak to our own vulnerability?

And how might a deeper awareness—of loss, love, and gratitude—shape the way we live, love, and walk with others?

Thank you for entering this sacred space together. May God grant you peace, insight, and a grateful heart—open to compassion for yourself, for others, and for Christ who shares our humanity.

The original Death and Dying Simulation Game came through Reverend Dick Lentz at St. Vincent's Hospice in Indianapolis, Indiana. Carol Ebeling, Executive Director of Hospice of Bloomington, introduced the experience to a group of students on the Bloomington campus in April, 1986.