spontaneity

Darren Wright

For use with devozine meditations for September 24–30, 2012.

MAKING THE CONNECTION
“In reflecting on the idea of spontaneity, I’ve discovered that much of what we think is spontaneous is merely doing what everyone else expects of us while the most spontaneous people are often those that seem quite rigid in their ways. Mother Teresa, for example, was as spontaneous as they come; but her spontaneous nature had become so much a part of her that no one noticed.

“We sometimes talk about being spontaneous when we give money to someone who needs it or when we do a good deed or when we spend time with God or listen as God speaks to us in the world around us. Why is this not our ordinary behavior? Why are we called “spontaneous” when we do something good or nice.

“Perhaps we need to practice being spontaneous until it becomes normal, until we forget we’re being spontaneous at all. We are simply who we are called to be and open to God’s voice.”

—Darren

MEET THE WRITER
Darren Wright is a Uniting Church Youth Worker serving in the Riverina Presbytery in NSW, Australia as the Presbytery Youth and Children’s Ministry Worker. Darren has previously worked in congregational ministry, high school chaplaincy, and local government as a youth worker, as well as a petrol station attendant, supermarket employee, dairy manager, and furniture sales person. His interests include music (Moby, Radiohead, Ben Harper, The National, Muse, All India Radio), film (MegaMind, Harry Potter, How to Train your Dragon, Scott Pilgrim), TV (Chuck, Doctor Who, Big Bang Theory, Community), theology, pop-culture, and working with young people in at-risk areas. He is particularly interested in how the church and theology connect with pop culture.
STUFF YOU WILL NEED
- paint
- paper plates
- large piece of paper or canvas
- instructions for activities that encourage spontaneity [http://improvencyclopedia.org/categories//Spontaneity.html]
- Bibles

PLUGGED IN
If you’d like to explore the possibilities for using video, music, and film in this session, here is a short list of options:

+ *Yes Man*—Check out this film with Zooey Deschanel and Jim Carey. When a man who says “no” to virtually everything for fear of failing decides to say “yes” to every offer, question, or task, what could go wrong? Question: Is it spontaneous if you’ve chosen to say yes to everything? What makes something spontaneous? [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1068680/]

+ *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*—Probably one of the funniest television shows, *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* puts a number of comedians on stage to perform improvisations. Flick through YouTube for episodes of the show.


CHECKING IN
Make sure the group has plenty of room to move around. Provide water, tea, coffee, and cookies, as well as cushions, chairs, or mats to sit on.

Introduce this week’s theme. Then ask:

**What keeps you from being spontaneous?**
**Does fear of condemnation or failure hold you back?**
**In what ways are you naturally spontaneous?**

Lay out large sheets of canvas or paper and a few paper plates with paint on them.

Invite group members to think of what, in the last week, they are thankful for and to use their hands to paint something that symbolizes their thanks. Encourage people to act quickly, without too much thought, and to be impulsive or spontaneous. Invite everyone to join in and not to worry about taking turns. Ask each person to paint more than one symbol.

When the paper is full, conclude the prayer of thanksgiving by saying, “*Amen.*”
Play a few of the improvisation games from the “Improv Encyclopedia” website. [http://improvencyclopedia.org/categories//Spontaneity.html] Then ask:

- What did you find difficult or easy in each game?
- What makes improvisation difficult?
- What would happen if we practiced more often?

EXPLORING THE WORD
Scripture: Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

Bring the group together. Invite discussion:

- What makes an act spontaneous?
- Who are the most spontaneous people you know?
- Why is being spontaneous difficult at times?
- How could we practice being spontaneous?
- How could we become confident enough to be spontaneous?
- Why do we speak of spontaneously giving money to a stranger or spontaneously being kind to someone? Is it normal behavior for us to walk by someone in need?
- In what ways was Jesus spontaneous?

Distribute Bibles. Invite each person to skim through one of the gospels and to find two or three examples of situations in which Jesus or the disciples were spontaneous. (If you like, allow people to work in pairs or small groups.) Give people time to explore the gospels for moments of spontaneity. These are examples of what they may find:

- **Mark 5:24–34**: Jesus’ response to the woman suffering from hemorrhages who touched his clothes in order to be healed. This was definitely an unplanned moment but one that Jesus handled as if this kind of spontaneous event were a regular occurrence for him.
- **Mark 7:24–30**: When the Syrophoenician woman challenged Jesus’ remark about not throwing the children’s food to the dogs, Jesus reevaluated his previous understanding of the situation. Both the woman and Jesus seemed to be speaking spontaneously.
- **Matthew 14:22–33**: Peter was pretty spontaneous, jumping into the water to walk with Jesus.

SHARING IN PRAYER

Invite the group to pray, using the format for the game Barney. [http://improvencyclopedia.org/games//Barney.html] Ask people to sit in a circle. Invite one person to be the caller. He or she will stand in the center of the circle, address one of the players in the circle, and call out a letter of the alphabet. The player must immediately respond with a particular place in the world, an issue, or a person that begins with the letter and that he or she would like the group to pray for. If he or she hesitates or gets tongue-tied, he or she becomes the caller.
When you think you’ve exhausted the group’s ideas, ask group members to conclude the prayer not by saying “Amen” but by making noises that symbolize their relationship with God this week.

TAKING IT FURTHER

• You might want to include an improvisation game in each of your gatherings to encourage the group to practice spontaneity.
• Arrange to have everyone in the group picked up sometime during the week and brought together for a come-as-you-are party. Or plan to take the group out for burgers or ice cream. Don’t let group members know your plans until you knock on their door to pick them up.